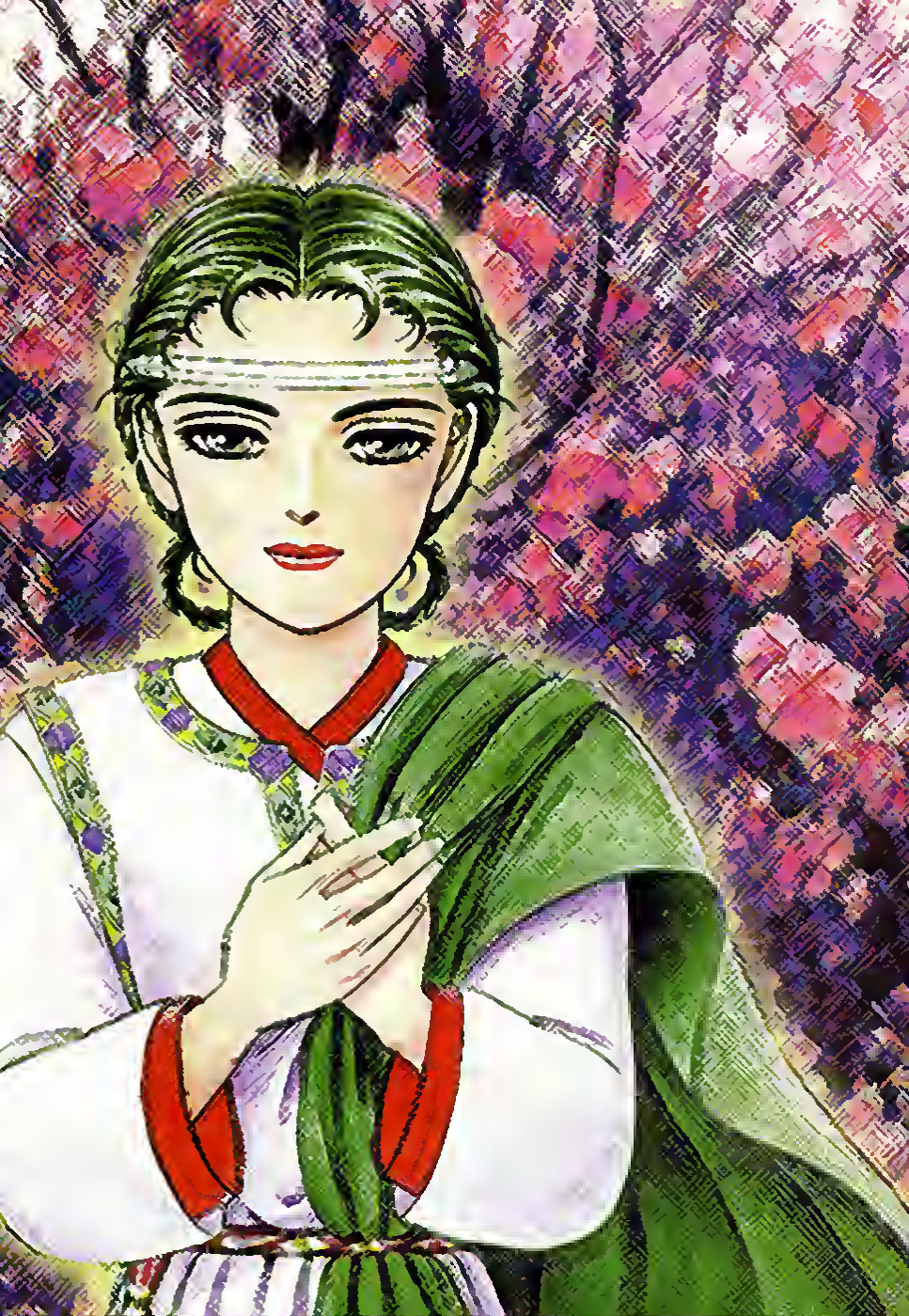
Itihasa 12

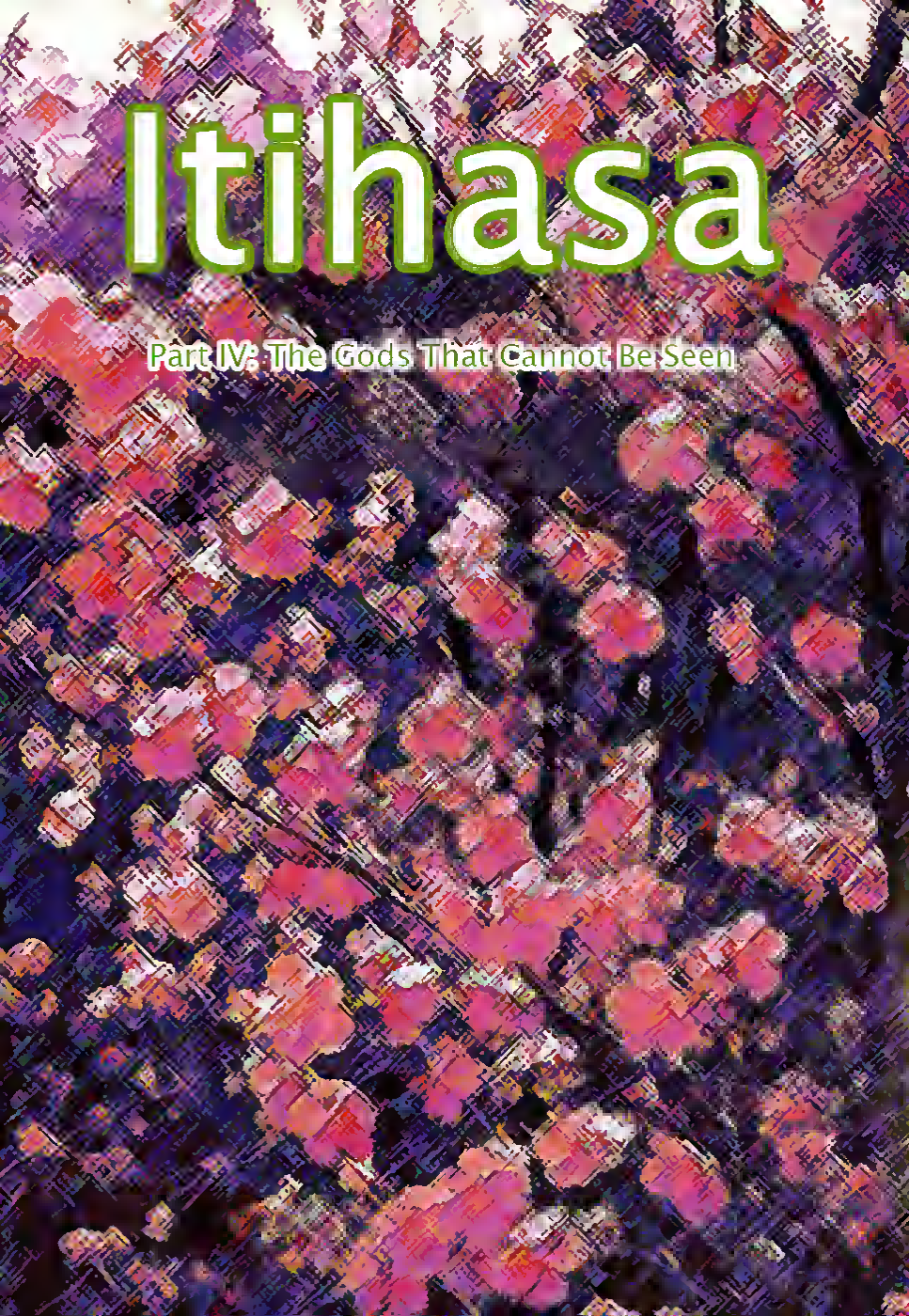
Wakako Mizuki

Hence the cycle of transmigration...

In contrast with all organisms, which evolve in order to continue to exist, this species exists in order to evolve.

That is why the souls of these reborn organisms accumulate information.




Itihasa
Part IV: The Gods That Cannot Be Seen

Recap & Main Characters

<Part I>Long, long ago... The gods that can be seen—divided into the warring demigods and demon gods—have traveled to this once-peaceful land, and the kind-hearted tribes who worship the gods that cannot be seen have become embroiled in their war. Toko's tribe is attacked by the Kiyu Faction, a group of demon gods under Kiyu the Silver Horned God.

Takaya, Toko and Aohiko, who were in the mountains looking for yang stones and escaped the attack, meet the demigod Risson, God of the True Law, and his warriors (including Katsura and Ichirota). The three decide to join the group in its pursuit of the demon gods. One day, Takaya is badly injured and near death. To save him, Toko chants a mantra that transfers her own lifeforce to him. As a result, Toko herself is left in serious condition. As she hovers between life and death, another Toko (?) appears and guides her towards life. Her other self tells her that they are fated to kill each other when they meet again.

Katsura falls in love with Aohiko. However, conscious of the dark fate that will swallow him up in a few years' time, Aohiko is unable to accept her feelings. On hearing this, Katsura privately vows to hide her feelings and protect Aohiko for as long as she lives.

One day, over seven years later, a hermit named Misen looks into Toko's past, and she learns she was born a twin. As a child, her twin was kidnapped and has become one of Kiyu's warriors. Takaya is kind as ever to Toko in her state of shock, unaware that Toko has come to love him as more than just a brother.

<Part II>Takaya and Toko are surrounded by the demon god's warriors, and Toko comes face to face with her twin, Yoko. In agony over both their separate lives, Toko is run through by a crazed Yoko's spear. However, Toko's soul enters Yoko, and Yoko becomes convinced that she is Toko.

Meanwhile, Aohiko engages Kiyu's army all by himself and is taken captive.

Then wings abruptly grow from Takaya's back. Like Kai, Takaya has Mamana blood in his veins.

Because Toko has borrowed Yoko's body, and Yoko has been hitted with a demon head-band, Toko is compelled to kill people. Then Yachio appears to Toko. Yachio is the one who knows the divine names of all the gods. Yachio tells Toko to go to Fuji. However, ever, her shock is so great that she falls into a deep sleep.

Aohiko, who is believed to hold Toko's secret, is very nearly killed by Hibiki, but thanks to Kimika's quick thinking, Ichirota saves him. Borrowing Aohiko's power, Toko releases her own life, choosing to live as both Toko and Yoko.

Meanwhile, in order to save Toko and Aohiko, Takaya, who has been entrusted with Risson's divine name, sets off for Shangri-La at Fuji with Katsura.

<Part III>

Takaya, Katsura and Kai are traveling to Fuji on foot.

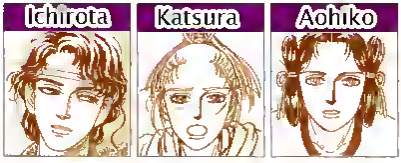
In a village along the way, they meet Tamia, a girl with Mamana blood, and her father, Hakuji. The encounter strengthens their thoughts for the as-yet-unseen land of Fuji. Good. Meanwhile, Mida, a demon god that serves Kiyu, manipulates Hibiki and attempts to make him kill Aohiko.

One night, Takaya saves the demigod Kaguya, who was about to be erased by Yarhio. At the same time, Aohiko temporarily loses his mind under the moon, and realizes that his doom is drawing nearer. Takaya decides to leave Katsura, Kai and Tamia and press on towards Fuji with Kaguya.

Takaya has finally reached the forest of illusory mists that spreads over the plains below Fuji. He parts with Kaguya and enters the forest alone. There, Amane's servant Kusuto awakens, manipulates an illusion of Toko and turns its sword on Takaya.

<Part IV>

Scales have spread over Tamia's arm. Hakuji and the others leave the village, hurrying toward Amane.

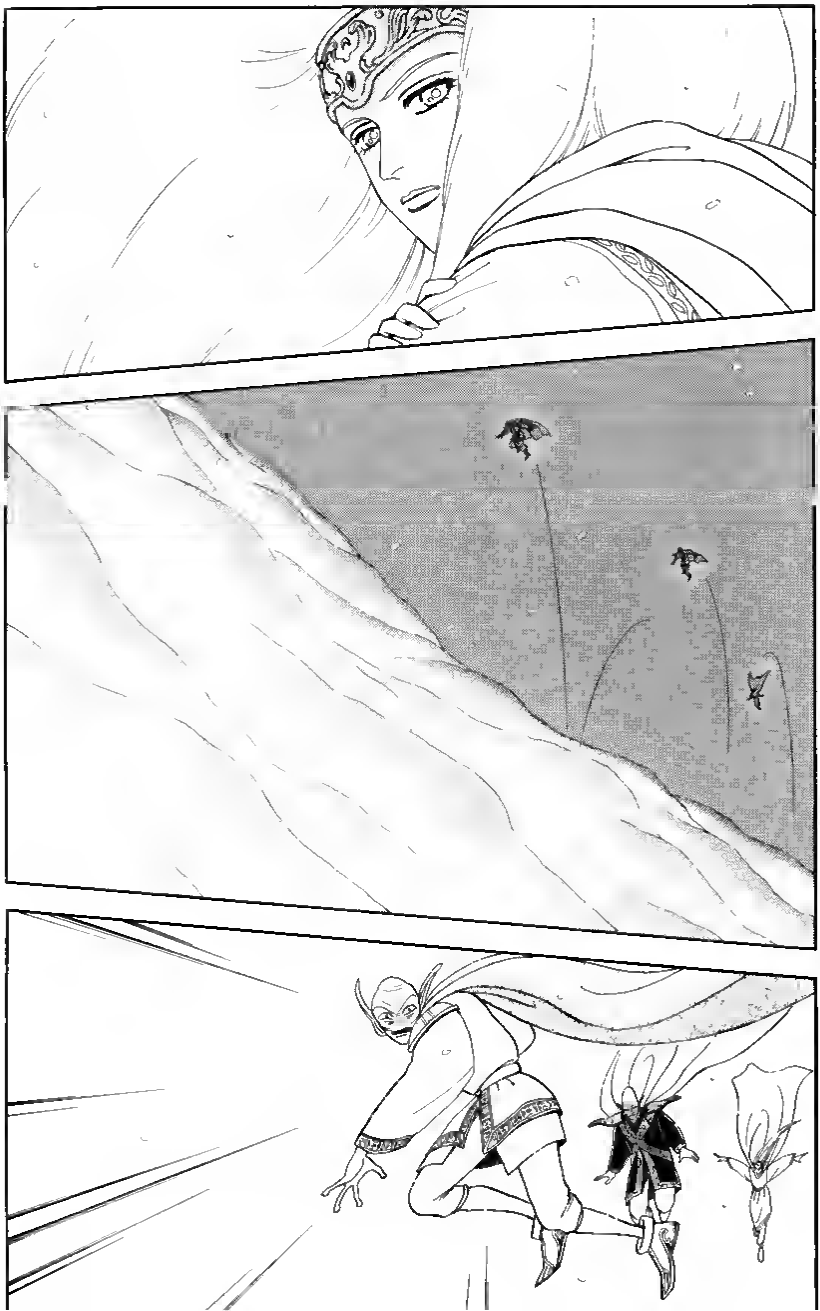


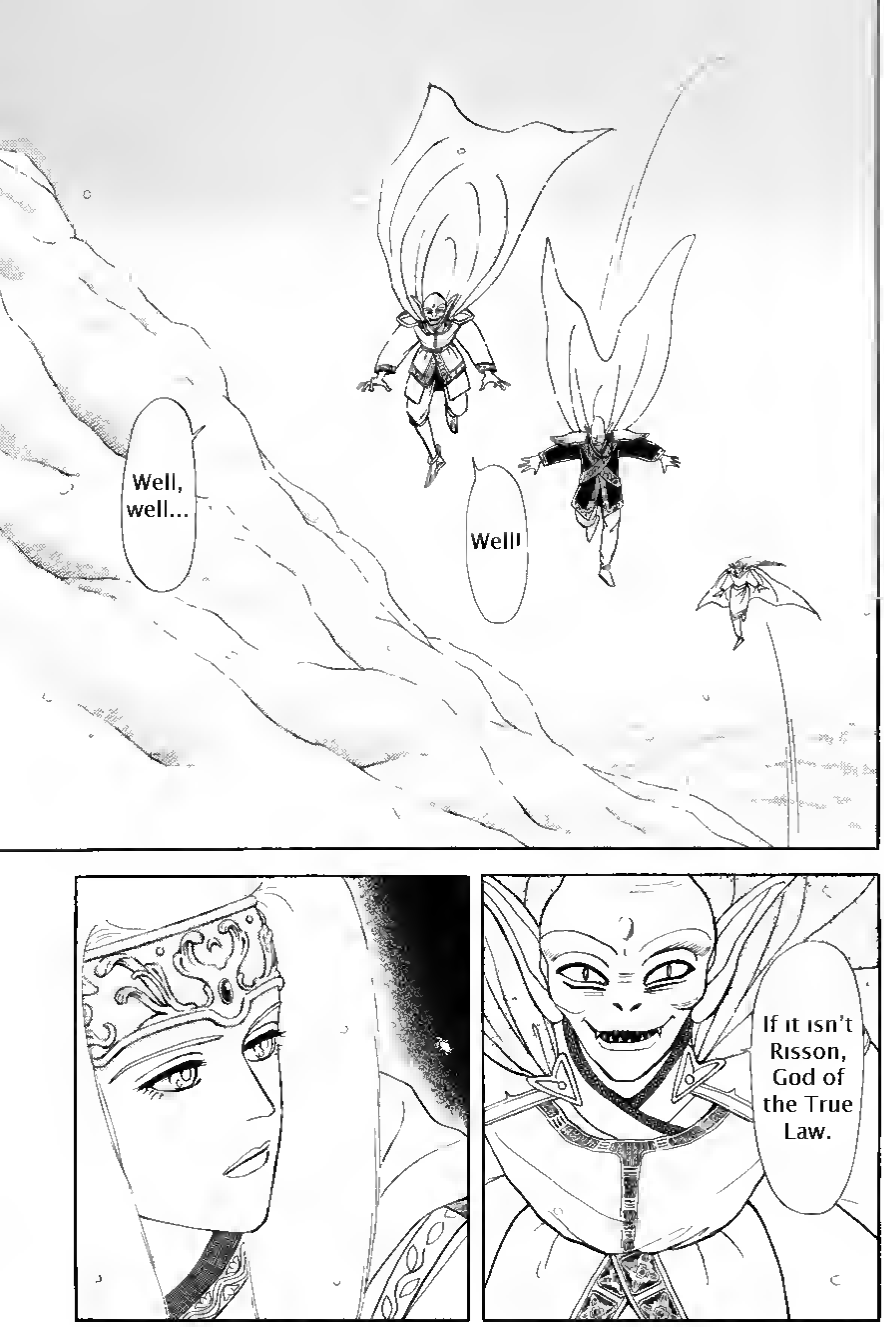
Meanwhile, having reached Fuji, Takaya finds he must kill many people to protect the peace of the village. Takaya, who doesn't want to kill anyone anymore, is wounded and torn.

One day, on the shore, Katsura and her group are surrounded by demon god warriors. She is miraculously reunited with Aohiko and the others, who happened to be passing by, but then a tsunami strikes...!

Mantra: a mysterious spell received from the gods that cannot be seen.
Mantra: a mysterious spell received from the gods that cannot be seen.

"Yin stone: a special stone that has negative energy. Its power is manifested through the use of mantras.
Demon headband: a headband Kiyu sets on the foreheads of his demon-god warriors. When these warriors are wounded, they go berserk."




Well, well...
Well!

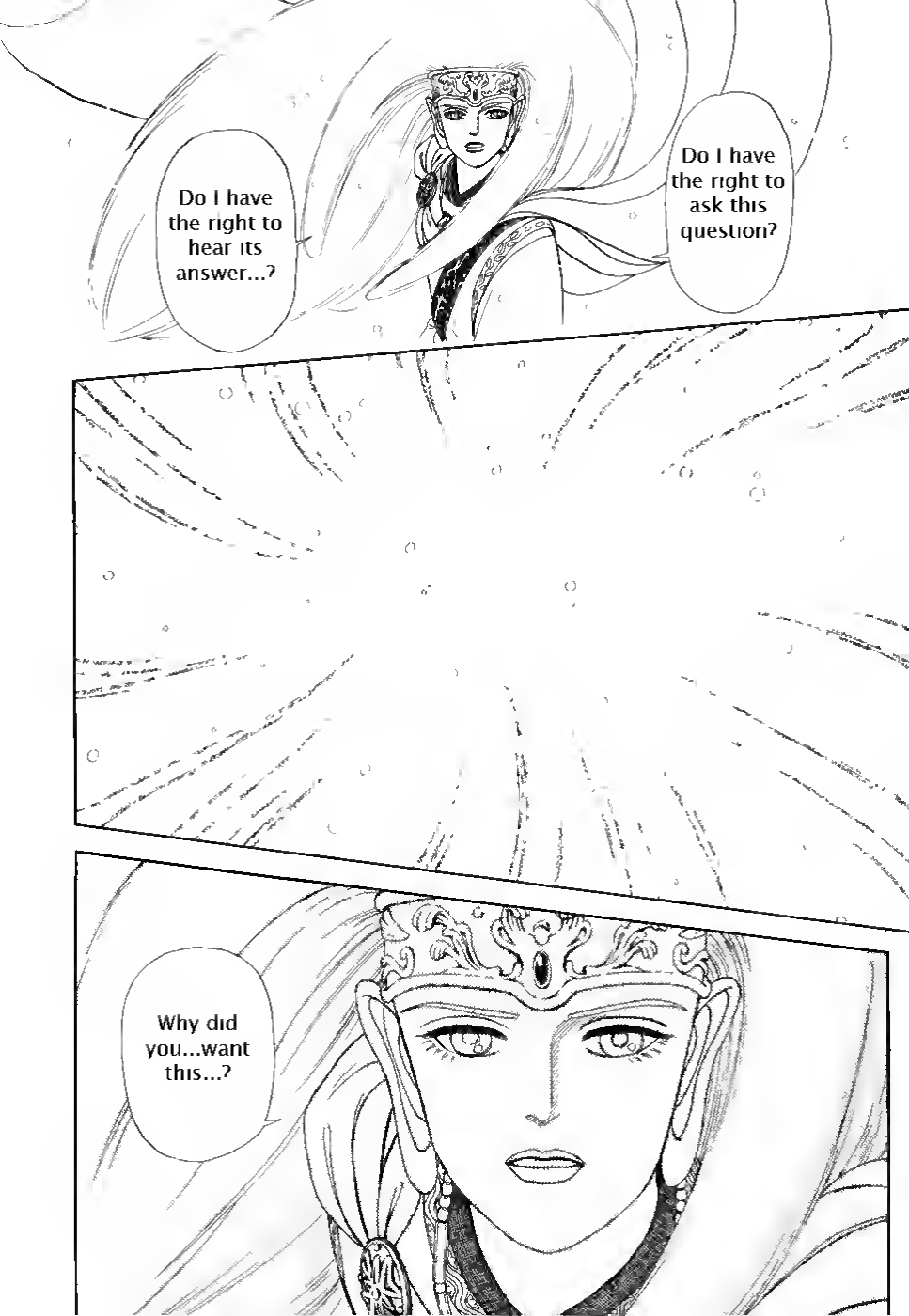
If it isn't Risson, God of the True Law.

Hiding, in a place like this?
Were the rumors true? Have you exhausted your strength...?
As a fighting demigod with many warriors, you were a threat to us. Yet now here you are, like the last snows waiting for the sun to melt them...
We'll turn you to dust, ever so carefully...
You fought us all alone.
It's no wonder.
Are you here on Kiyu's orders?

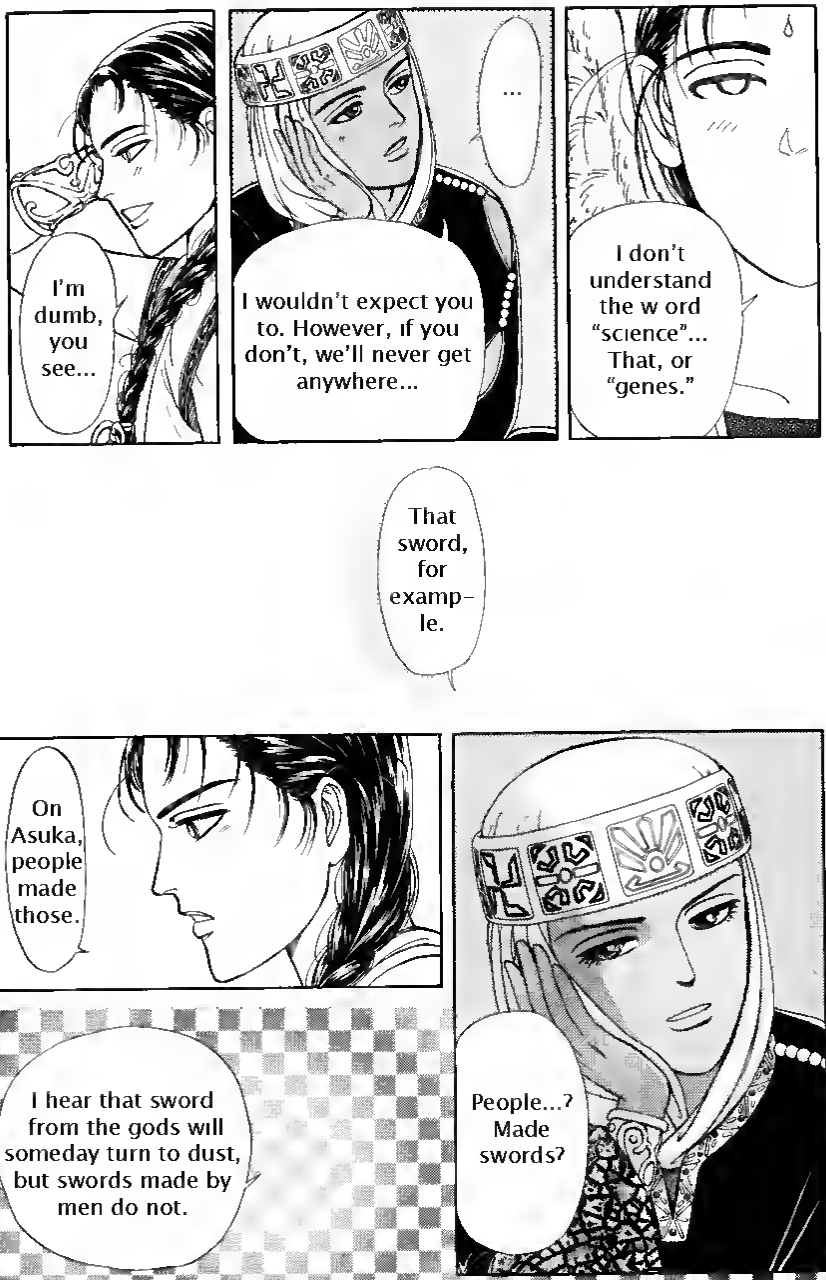
We are indeed ...
Now we'll have some-thing good to tell him
I fear you won't.
What?
Mount Towada is sacred to the gods that cannot be seen...
Do you mean to fight us with that drained body of yours!?

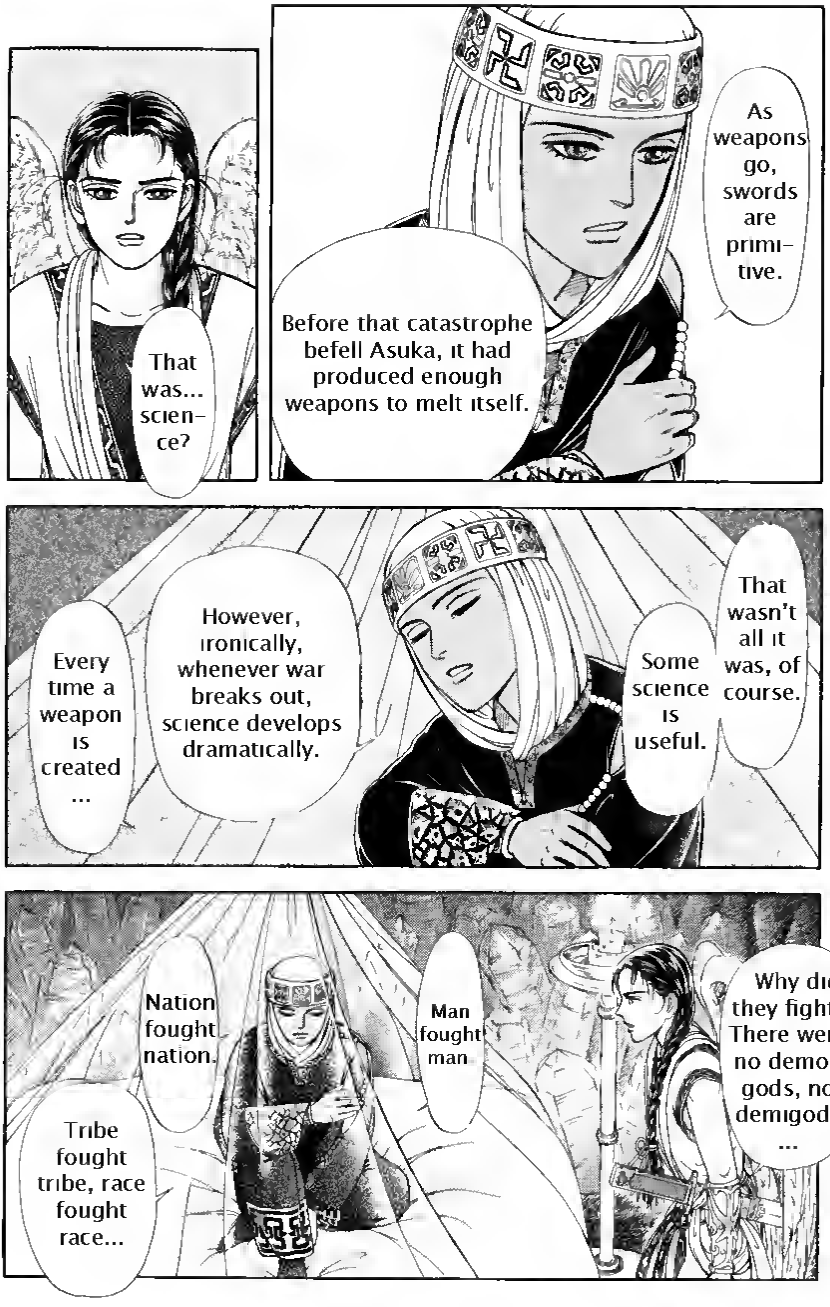
Ah!
Ough!
SSSHH
Gyah!
Gwah!
FWISH
It turns both demigods and demon gods to dust.

Why do I alone remain as I am, without becoming dust?
Then why ...?


Do I have the right to hear its answer...?
Do I have the right to ask this question?
Why did you...want this...?

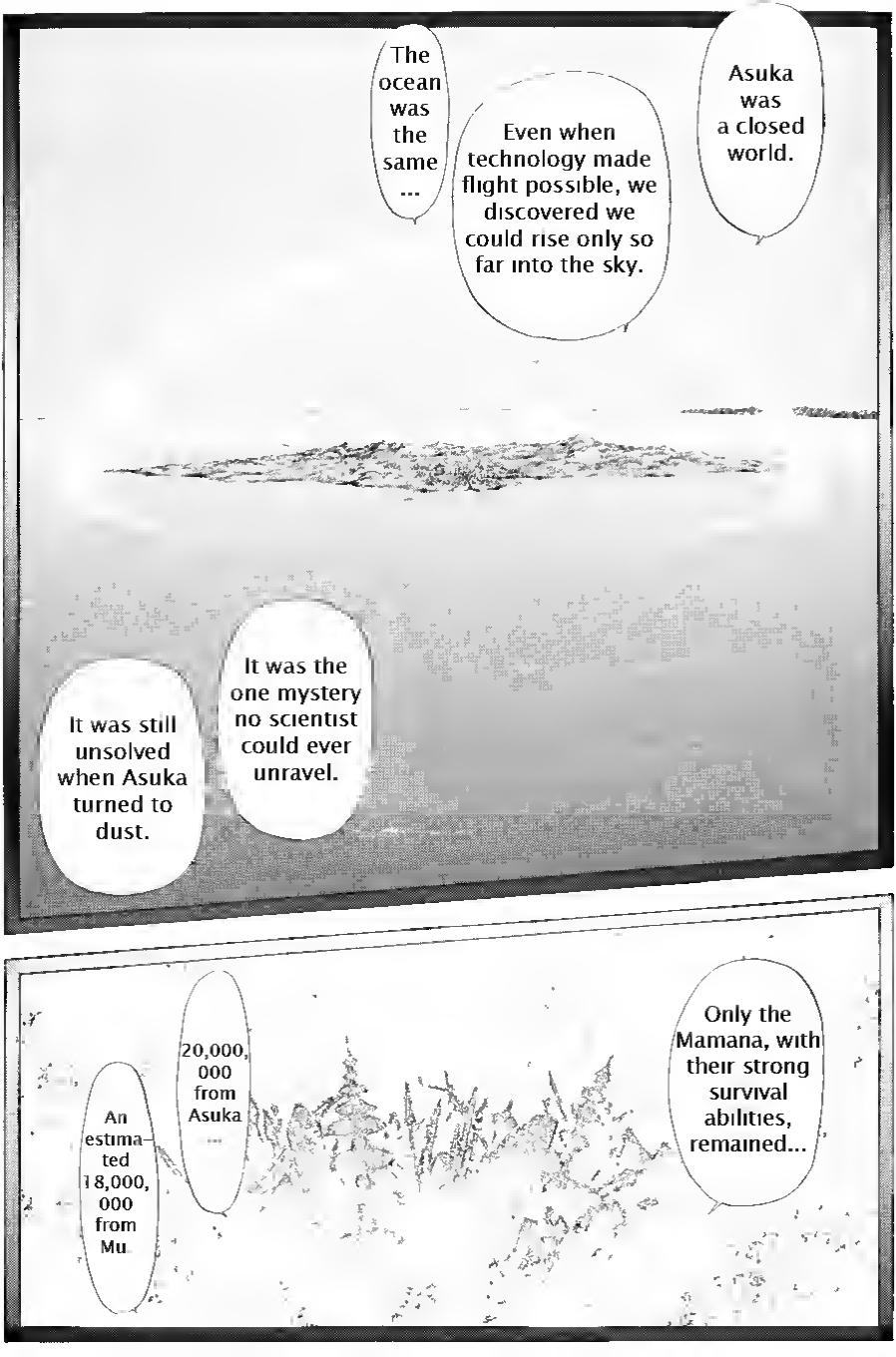
... Well?
Of the words I just explained, were there any you didn't understand?
Honestly, I, uh... didn't get most of it.
Better to admit it than pretend you had...
What do you understand least, then...?

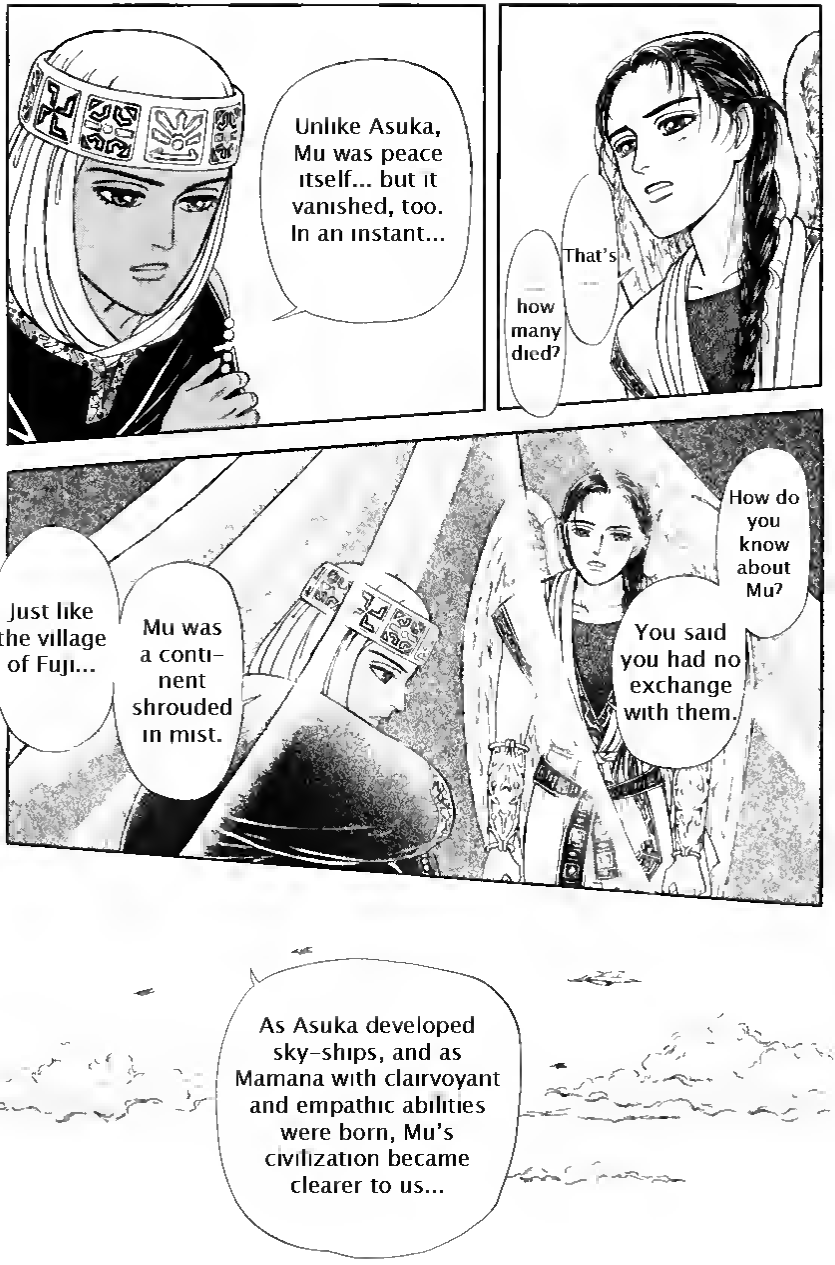

I'm dumb, you see...
I wouldn't expect you to. However, if you don't, we'll never get anywhere...
...
I don't understand the w ord "science"... That, or "genes."
That sword, for examp- le.
On Asuka, people made those.
People...? Made swords?
I hear that sword from the gods will someday turn to dust, but swords made by men do not.

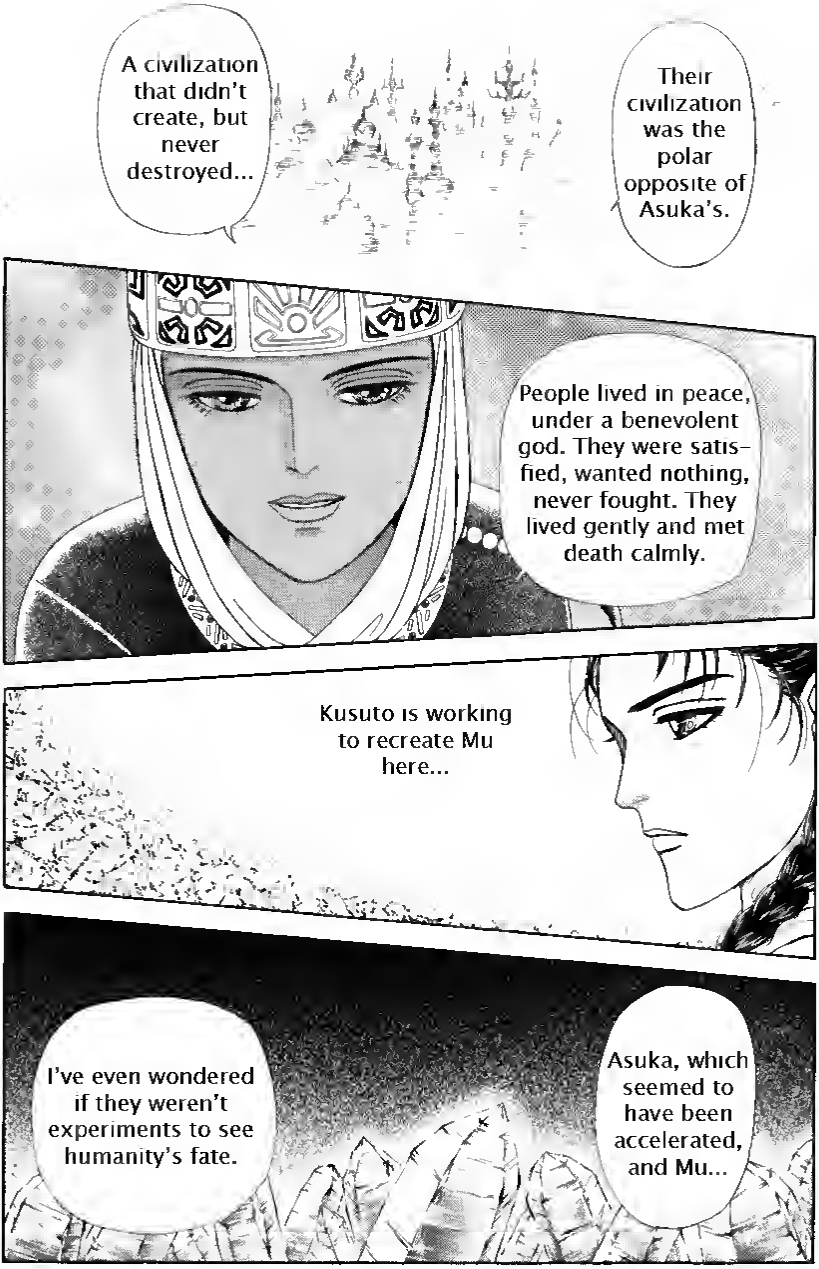

That was... science?
As weapons go, swords are primitive.
Before that catastrophe befell Asuka, it had produced enough weapons to melt itself.
That wasn't all it was, of course.
Some science is useful.
However, ironically, whenever war breaks out, science develops dramatically.
Every time a weapon is created ...
Why did they fight? There were no demon gods, no demigods ...
Man fought man.
Nation fought nation.
Tribe fought tribe, race fought race...

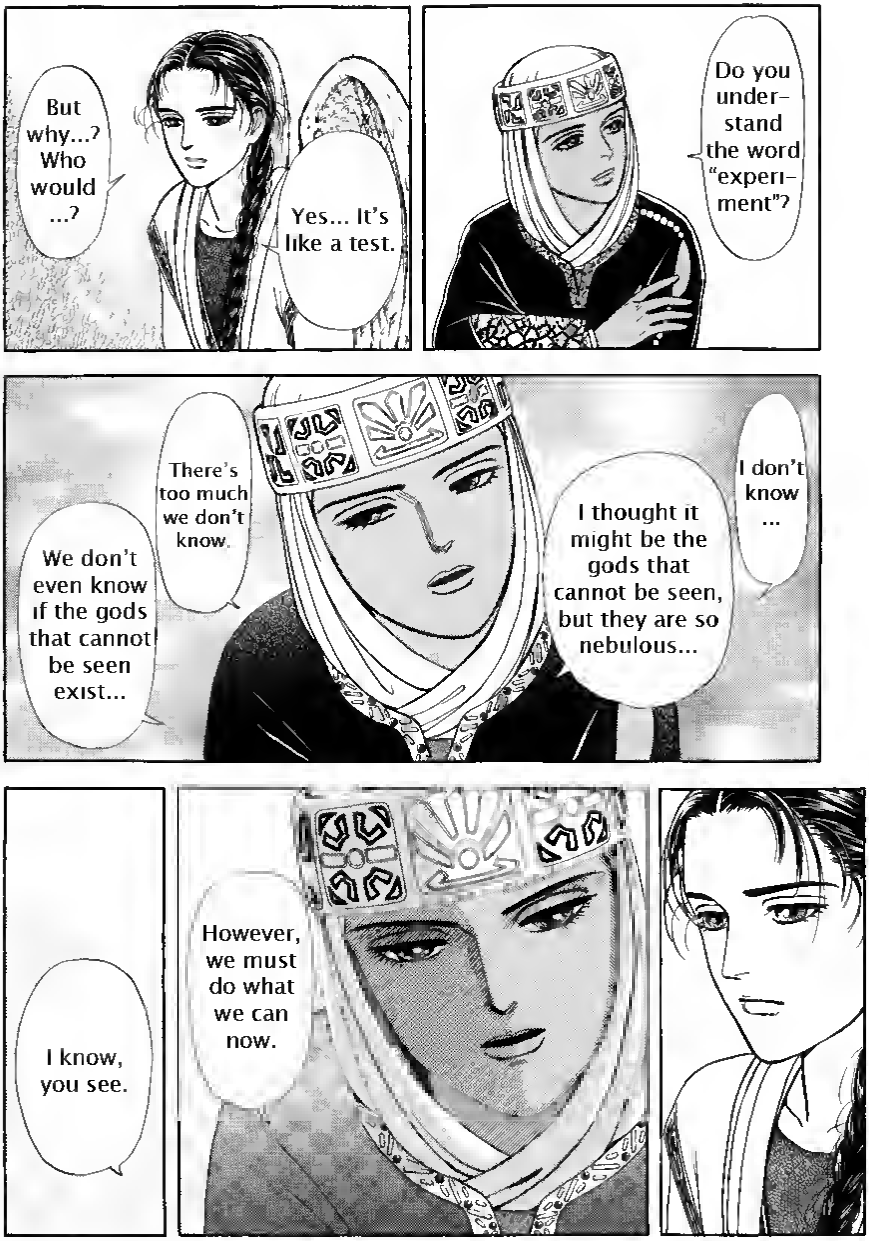
They fought for...
...noble causes.
...
The human race was broken somehow...
Even if the land of Asuka hadn't turned to dust, it was desolate and no longer able to sustain life.

Because of... science?
The Mamana, too?
Were they created as weapons?
...
Just look at yourself. Can't you tell?
Strong body. Special abilities ...
But the strange powers were coincidence, the result of genetic manipulation.

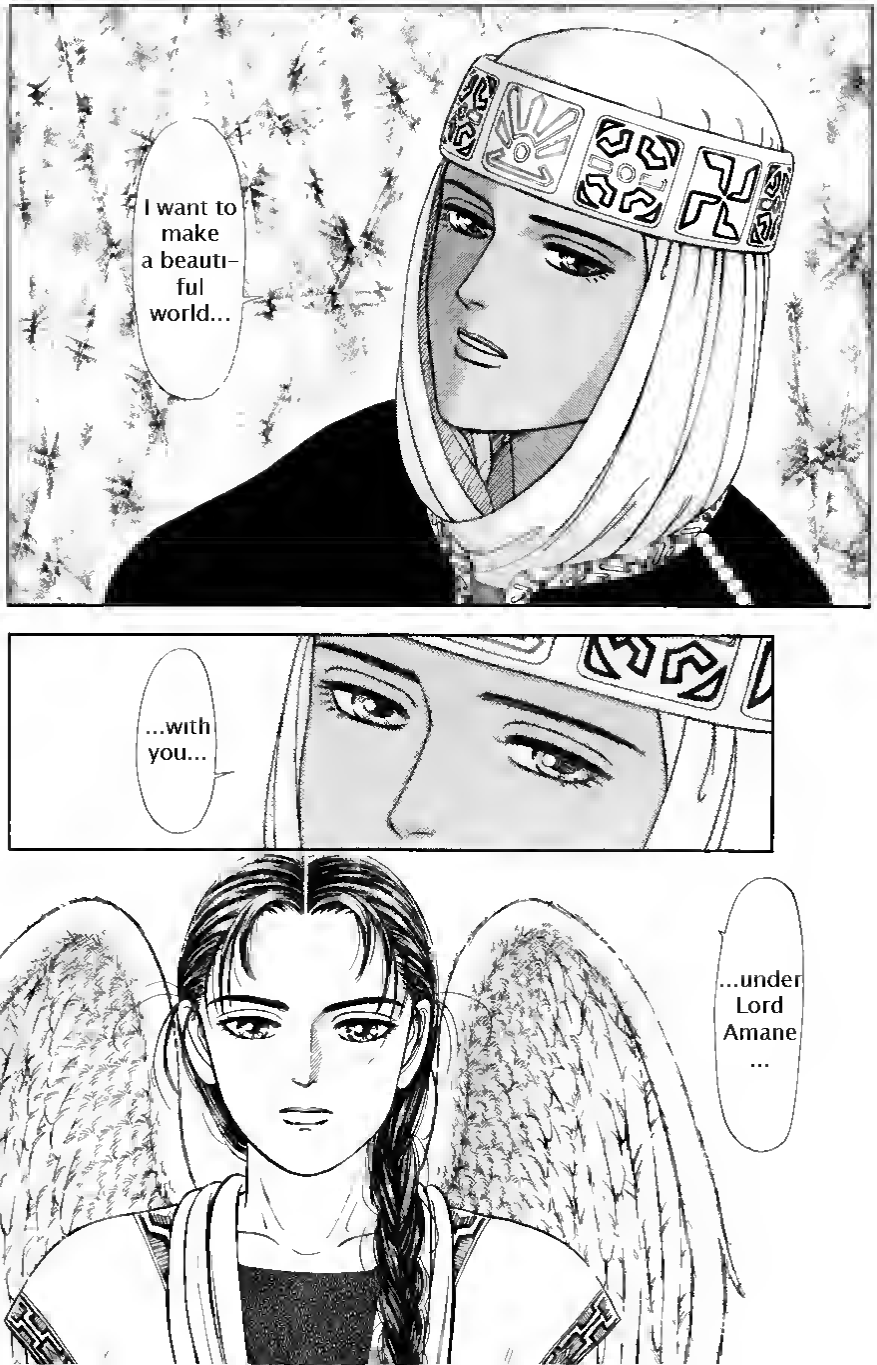

The ocean was the same ...
Even when technology made flight possible, we discovered we could rise only so far into the sky.
Asuka was a closed world.
It was still unsolved when Asuka turned to dust.
It was the one mystery no scientist could ever unravel.
An estimated 18,000,000 from Mu
20,000,000 from Asuka ...
Only the Mamana, with their strong survival abilities, remained...


Unlike Asuka, Mu was peace itself... but it vanished, too. In an instant...
That's —
how many died?
How do you know about Mu?
You said you had no exchange with them.
Mu was a continent shrouded in mist.
Just like the village of Fuji...
As Asuka developed sky-ships, and as Mamana with clairvoyant and empathic abilities were born, Mu's civilization became clearer to us...


A civilization that didn't create, but never destroyed...
Their civilization was the polar opposite of Asuka's.
People lived in peace, under a benevolent god. They were satisfied, wanted nothing, never fought. They lived gently and met death calmly.
Kusuto is working to recreate Mu here...
I've even wondered if they weren't experiments to see humanity's fate.
Asuka, which seemed to have been accelerated, and Mu...

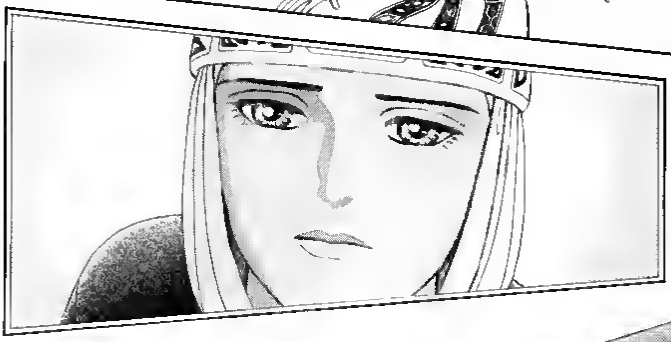

But why...? Who would ...?
Yes... It's like a test.
Do you under-stand the word "experi-ment"?
We don't even know if the gods that cannot be seen exist...
There's too much we don't know.
I thought it might be the gods that cannot be seen, but they are so nebulous...
I don't know ...
I know, you see.
However, we must do what we can now.

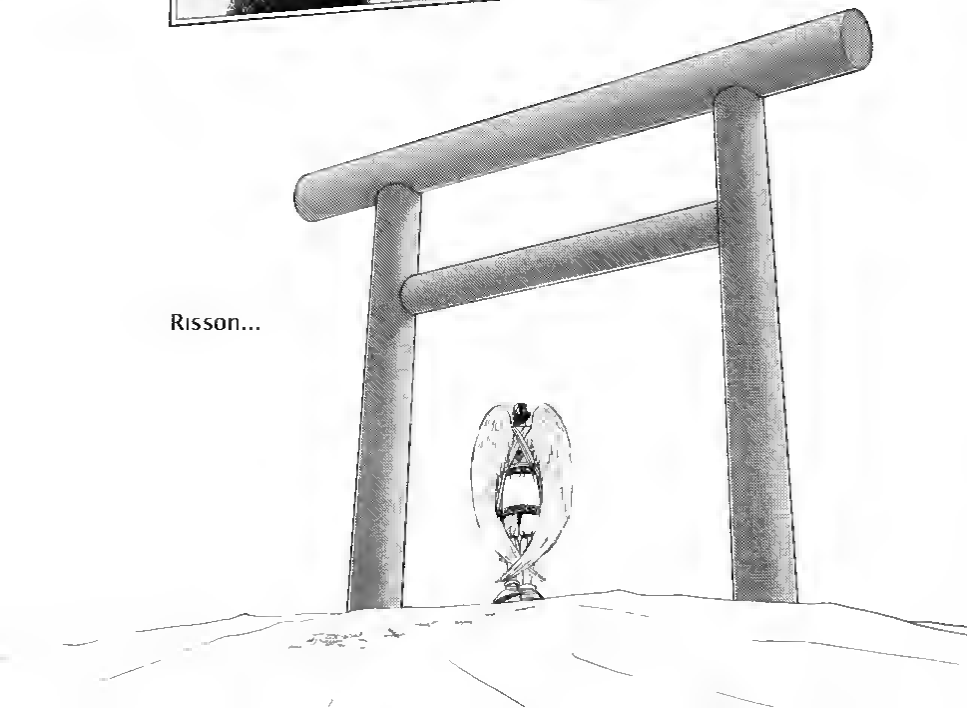
For humanity to escape extinction, its civilization must be like Mu's.
Now, I am the only one who knows...
That is the only way to save humans and this planet.
Gods and humans, coexis-ting...

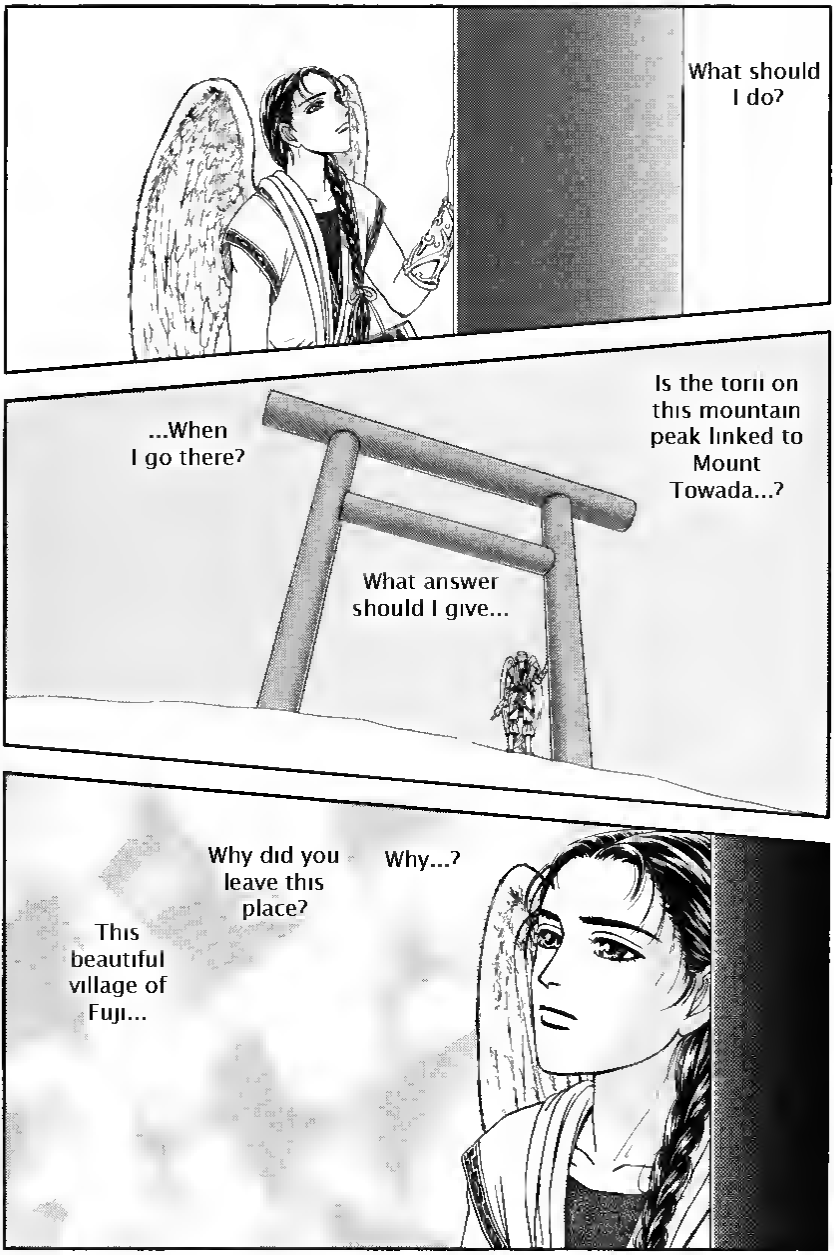

I want to make a beautiful world...
...with you...
...under Lord Amane...

How much fighting have they seen over their long life...?
Those eyes were sorrowful, almost pleading.
"A beautiful world"...

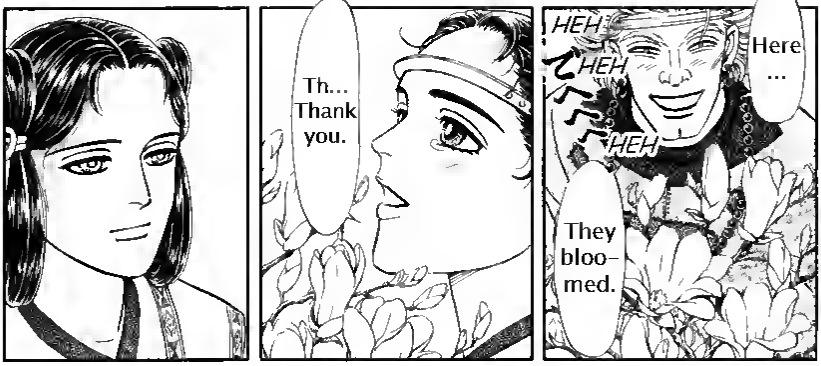
After I said it, I couldn't even look Kusuto in the eye.
The best I could do was ask Kusto to wait just a bit longer...

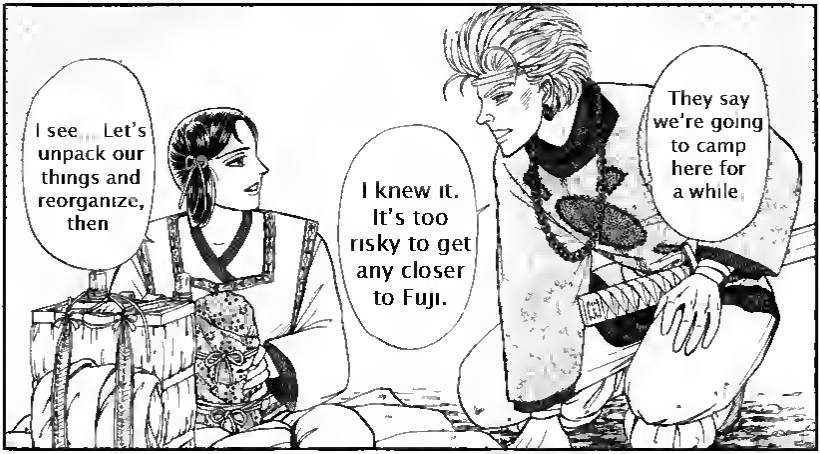



Risson...


What should I do?
Is the torii on this mountain peak linked to Mount Towada...?
...When I go there?
What answer should I give...
Why...?
Why did you leave this place?
This beautiful village of Fuji...

Toko.
You're crying.
Yes ...?
Oh...
You were thinking about Kai and Katsura again, huh?
Your eyes are gonna melt.


Th... Thank you.
HEH
HEH
HEH
Here ...
They bloo-med.


I see... Let's unpack our things and reorganize, then
I knew it. It's too risky to get any closer to Fuji.
They say we're going to camp here for a while.

From that shore...
We've come four days' walk from there...
Four days...

I'd never seen sorrow crystallize on anyone's face that way before...
I can't forget Aohiko's profile... back then...

I kept calling his name...
Aohi-ko!
I was frantic.
Aohi-ko!
Aohi-ko!
I thought he'd leave... Cross to the other side, just like that...
Toko...

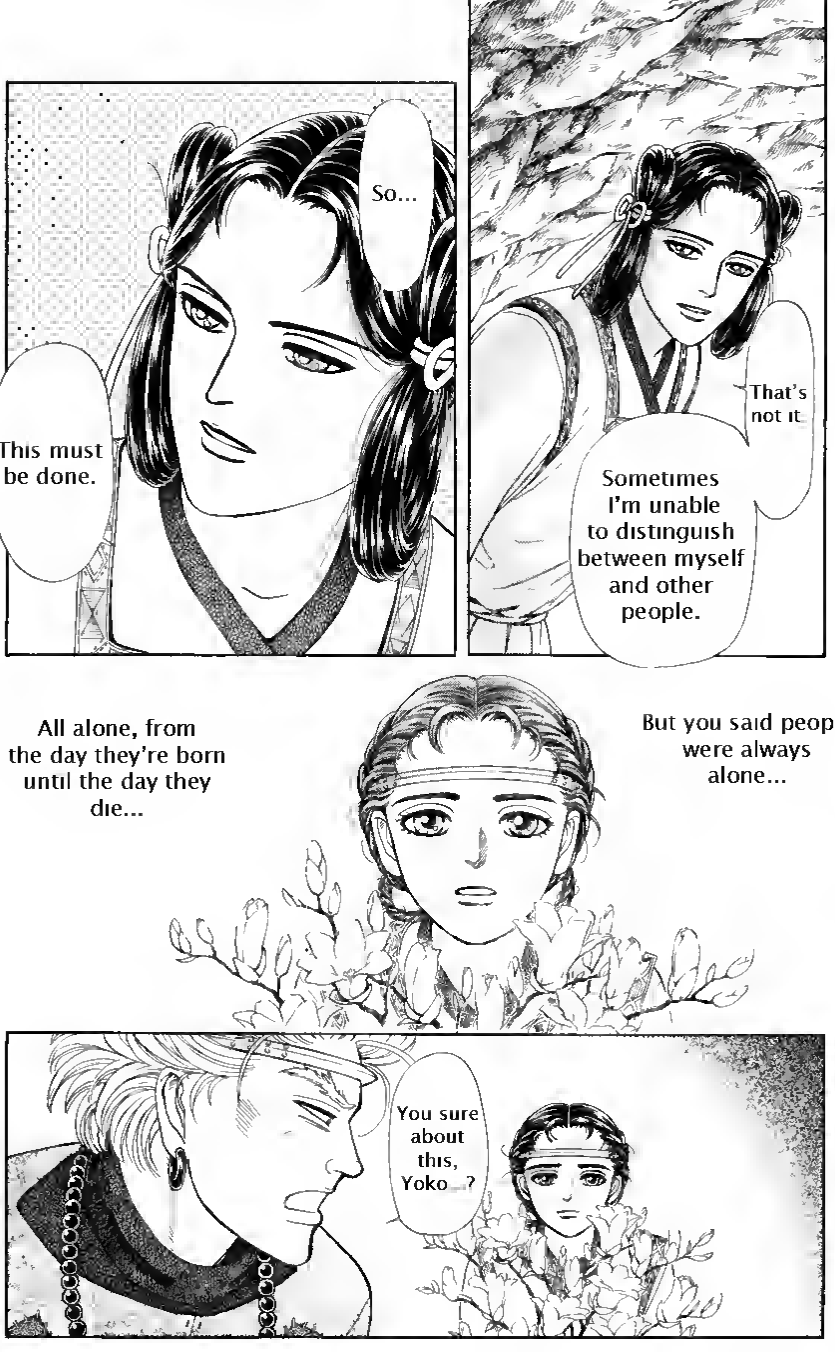
Aohiko's staying here so that I won't be alone...
He's doing this for me.
I'm sor...
I'll help ...
Aohiko, please!
Aohi-ko!
Nobody needs you, reject.
What now?
Aohiko! Please!

You know he's still asleep, don't you!?
Wake Nachi up!
Reje
It won't work!
Go ask Kiyu to do it!
Kiyu pulled him out of that tsunami!
But you can wake him up, can't you?
It won't ...
You woke Toko up...

Hibiki's going to kill him.
But he'll ...
But ...
If that guy wakes up, he'll try to kill Aohiko!
Don't be an idiot!
I ran here.
I was afraid to leave him alone, even now...
Ever since that day, Hibiki's been watching for a chance.
Besides, if he stays like this, he'll weaken and die.

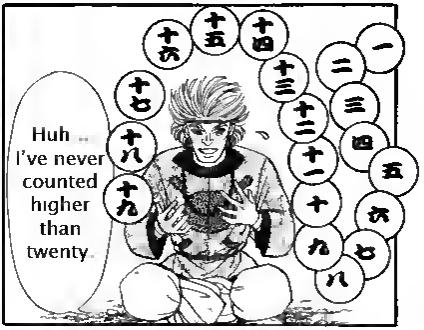
Don't let that woman's emotions win you over, Aohiko!
I was already thinking of going ...
Aohi- ko!
Plea- se...
Don't intrude. This is between me and Nachi.
Aohi- ko!
Aohiko!-

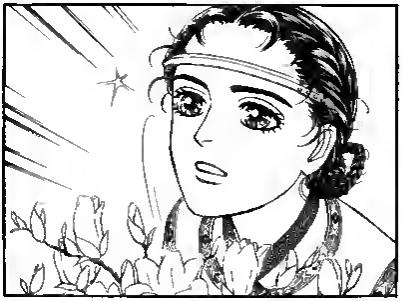
I'm doing it for me.
This isn't for Nachi.
Don't
Aohi-ko!
Aohi-ko!
BLEH
Don't follow me!
You never think about yourself!
You're not thinking!


So...
This must be done.
That's not it
Sometimes I'm unable to distinguish between myself and other people.
All alone, from the day they're born until the day they die...
But you said people were always alone...
You sure about this, Yoko_?

Do you see a "you" that's both alone and not alone?
If you look at yourself, and look, and look, and keep looking, do you begin to see that sort of "you," beyond the "you" that's alone?

Attagirl!
I'll protect Aohiko.
We'll count to a hundred, then go!


Huh ... I've never counted higher than twenty
一
二
三
四
五
六
七
八
九
十
十一
十二
十三
十四
十五
十六
十七
十八
十九

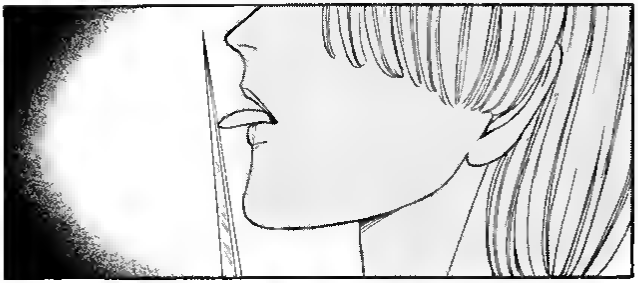


Ki...
Lord Ki...
Ki...
Kiyu ...

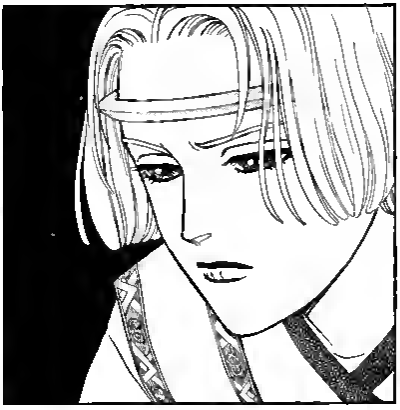
Kiyu...

Come ...
Ah...
Oh... Yeah ...
After a hundred ... Kyoji.
SWISH

Kiyu
...
I wish to speak with you.



SHUF



Hibiki.
What were you going to do!?
What? Hey, what gives!?
What have you got in your hand, huh!?
Oh... Oh, sure you were!
I'm visiting!
HMPH!

Quiet ...
Kiyu found him before he drowned...
Why won't he wake up?
See!? His pulse is normal.
Get out!
When he opens his eyes, he'll have to admit that woman is dead.

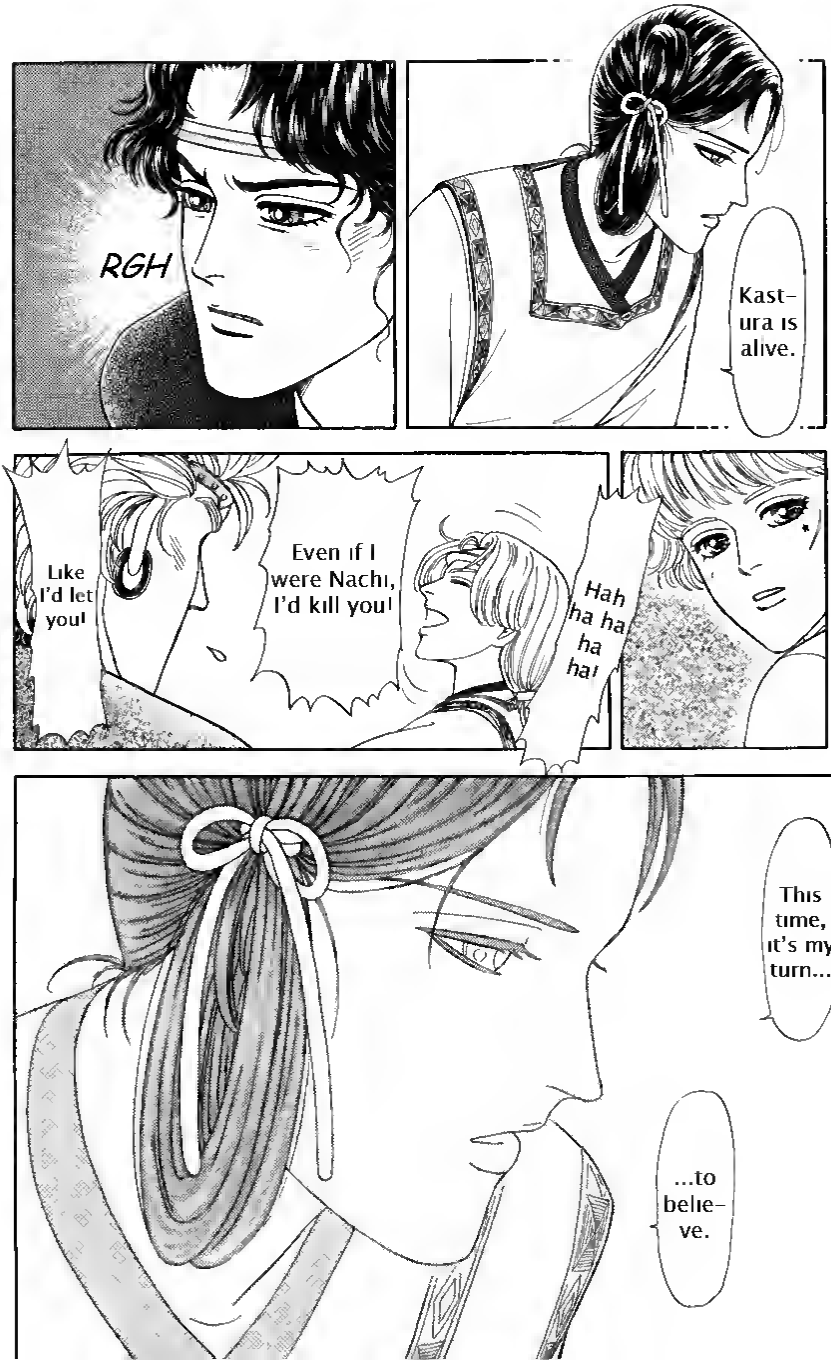
If you can't be quiet, both of you go outside. Please.
Even you ...
I don't want to hear this from you!
Get out!
All this over some woman's life...
Pituful.
Ichiro-ta.

Katsu-
ra is
alive...
I believe
she is.
She's
strong
...
I know
she's
alive.

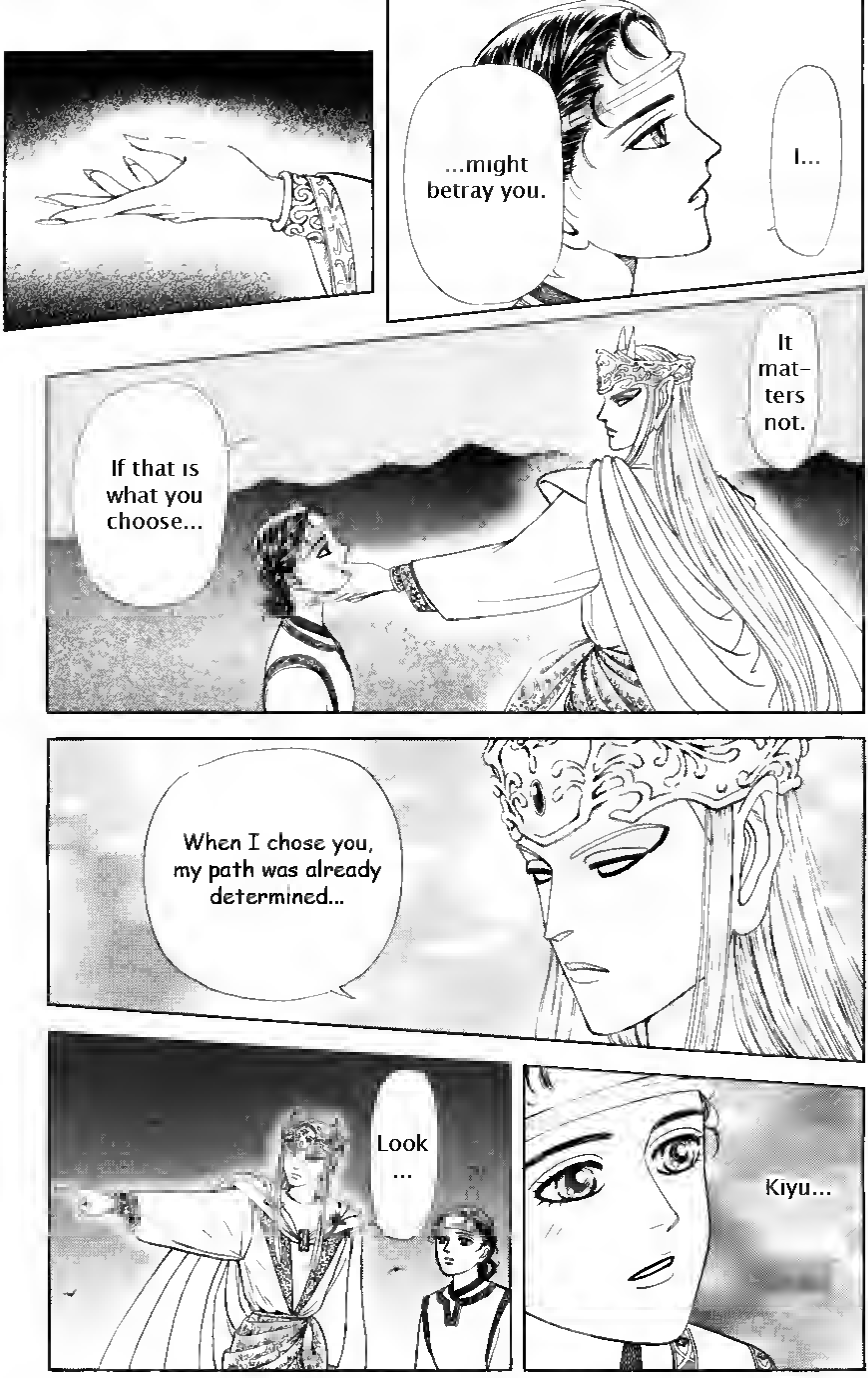
Leaving me like this, when I believe?
You don't mind ...
... alive ...
Lea- ving me...

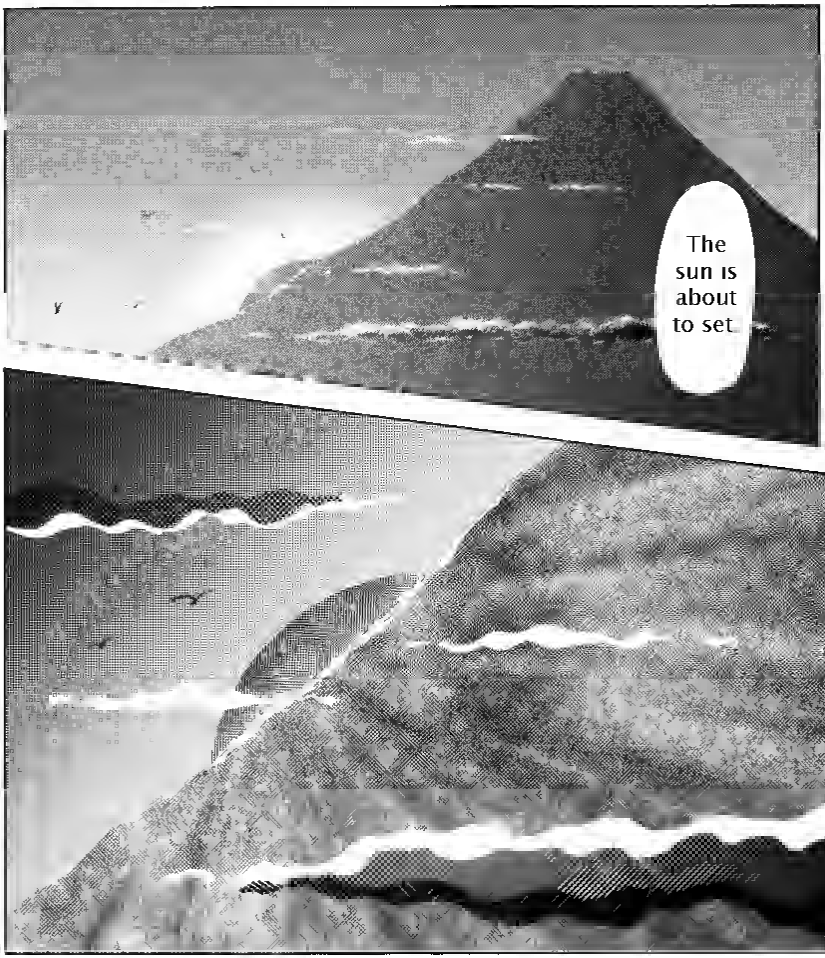
Nachi!
GRTT
Aohi-ko!
Nachi! No!

How dare you be alive!?
How dare you...
If you died, Katsura would die right there!
I asked him to come! You wouldn't wake up...
Let him go!
FLING


RGH
Kast-
ura is
alive.
Like
I'd let
you!
Even if I
were Nachi,
I'd kill you!
Hah
ha ha
ha
ha!
This
time,
it's my
turn...
...to
belie-
ve.

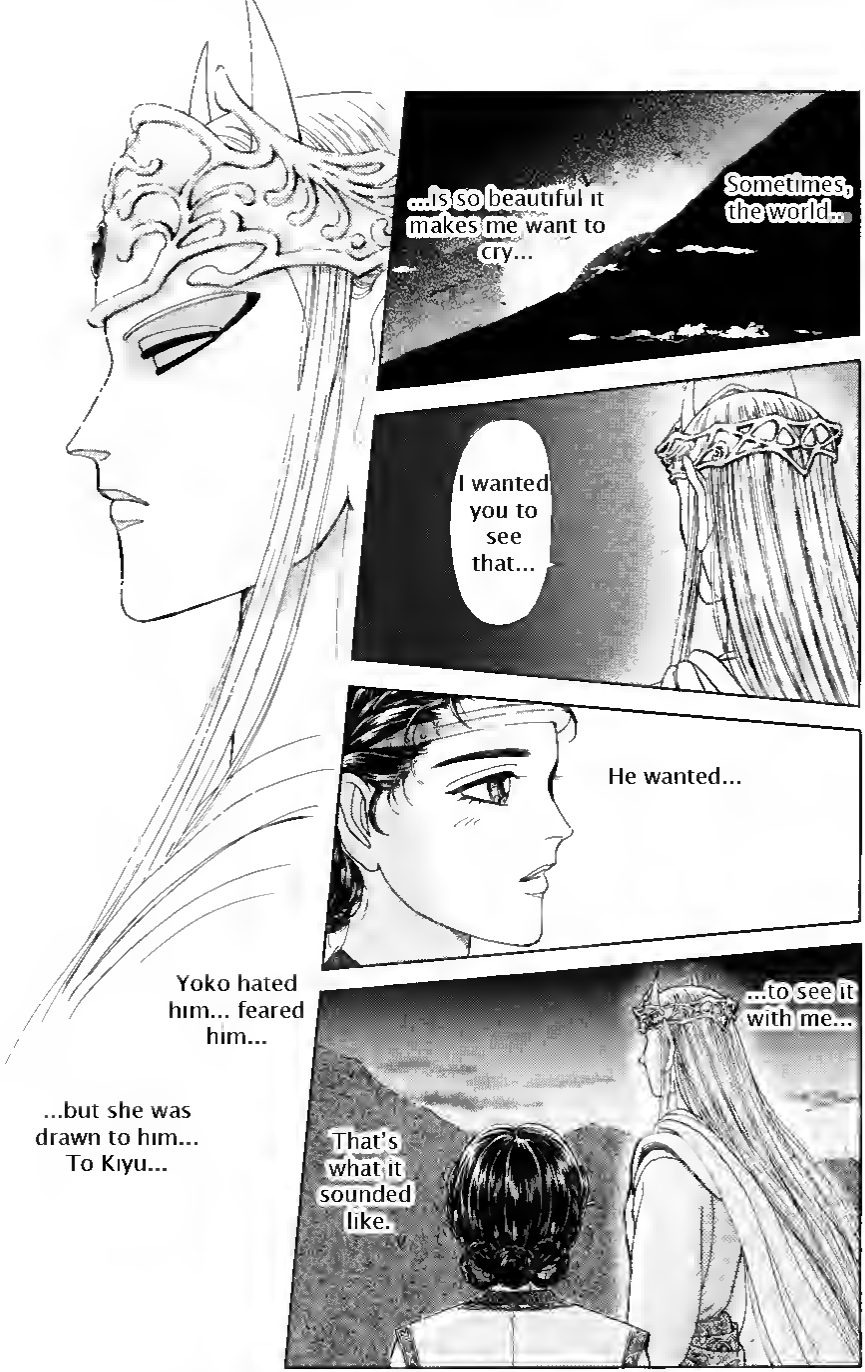
How the villagers... and the demon god warriors who embraced Amane live...
The secret of Amane's power ...
The number of demi-gods ...
...to find that out?
You want me...
No one else could enter the village of Fuji unsuspected ...
You or Aohiko...

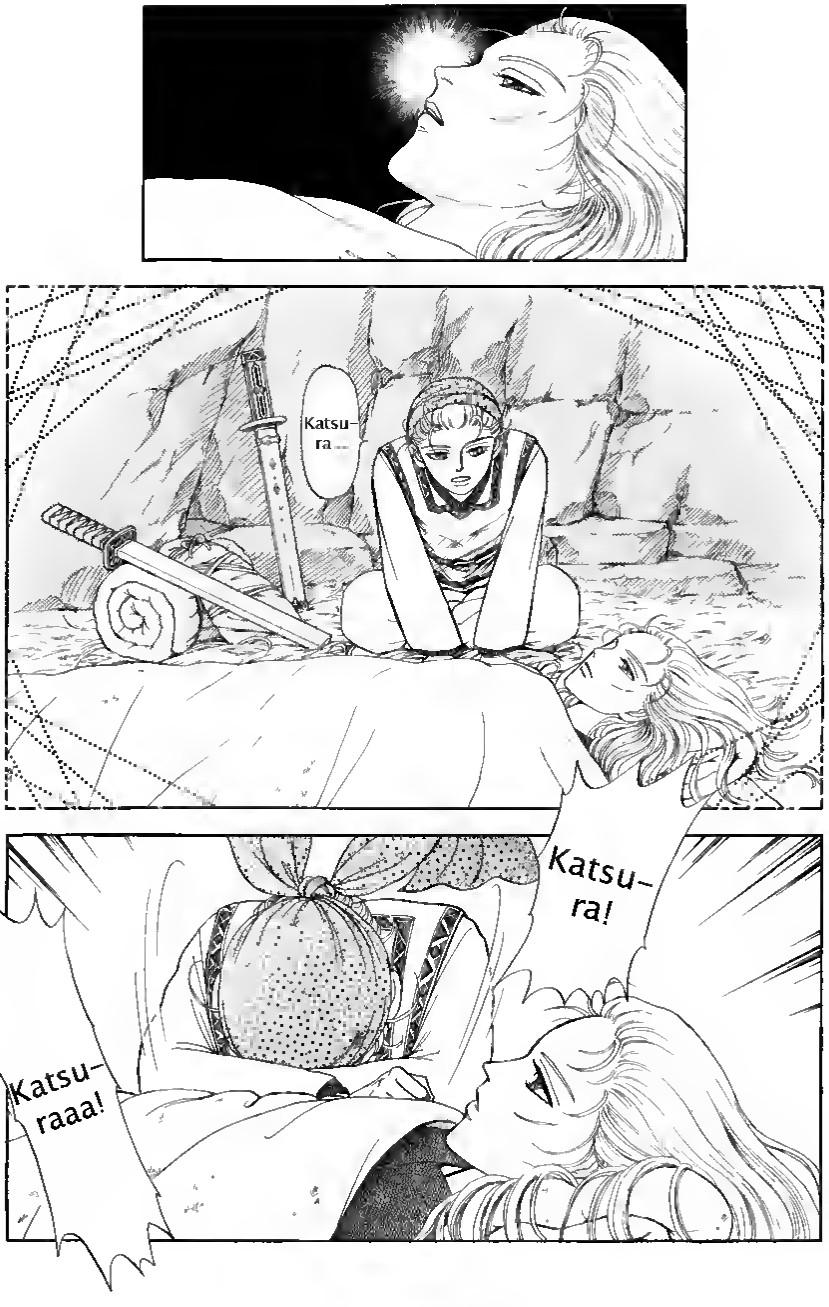

I...
...might betray you.
It mat-ters not.
If that is what you choose...
When I chose you, my path was already determined...
Look ...
Kiyu...

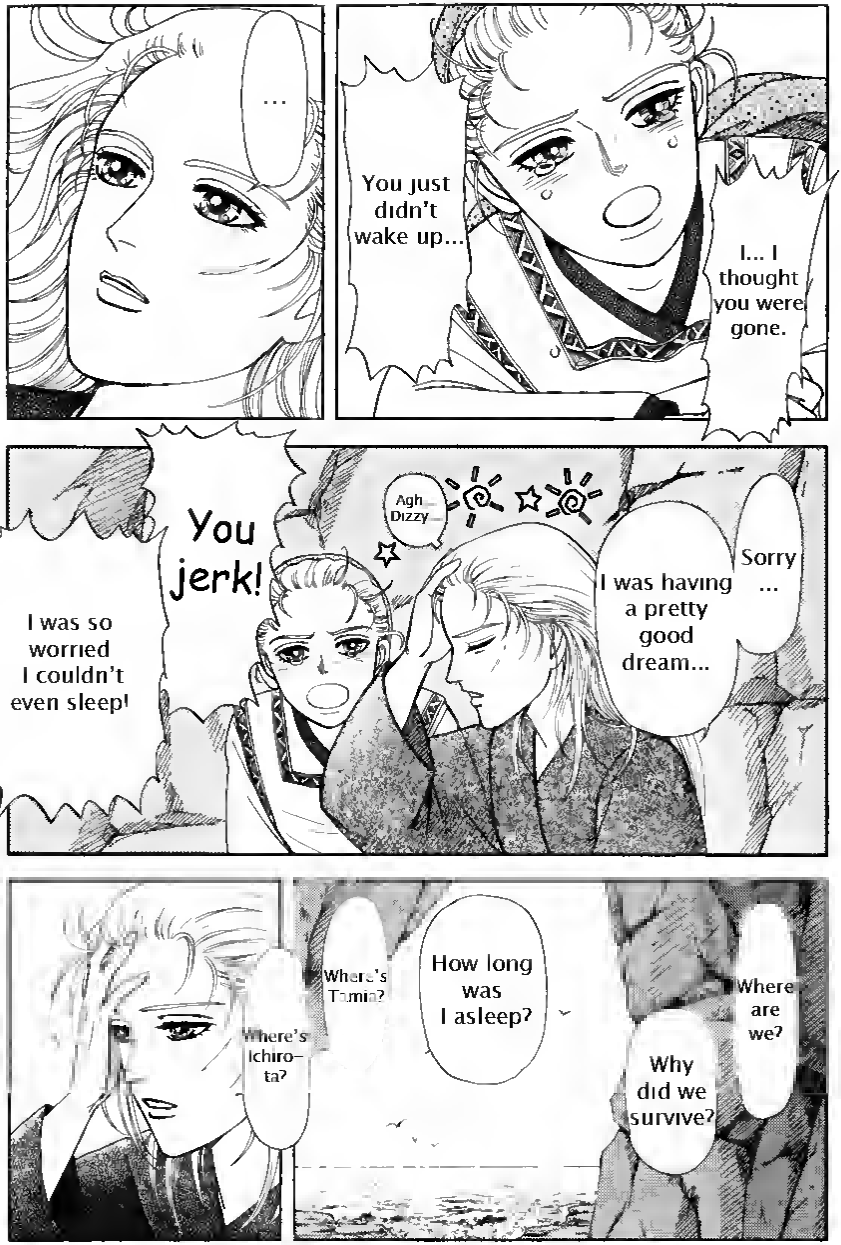


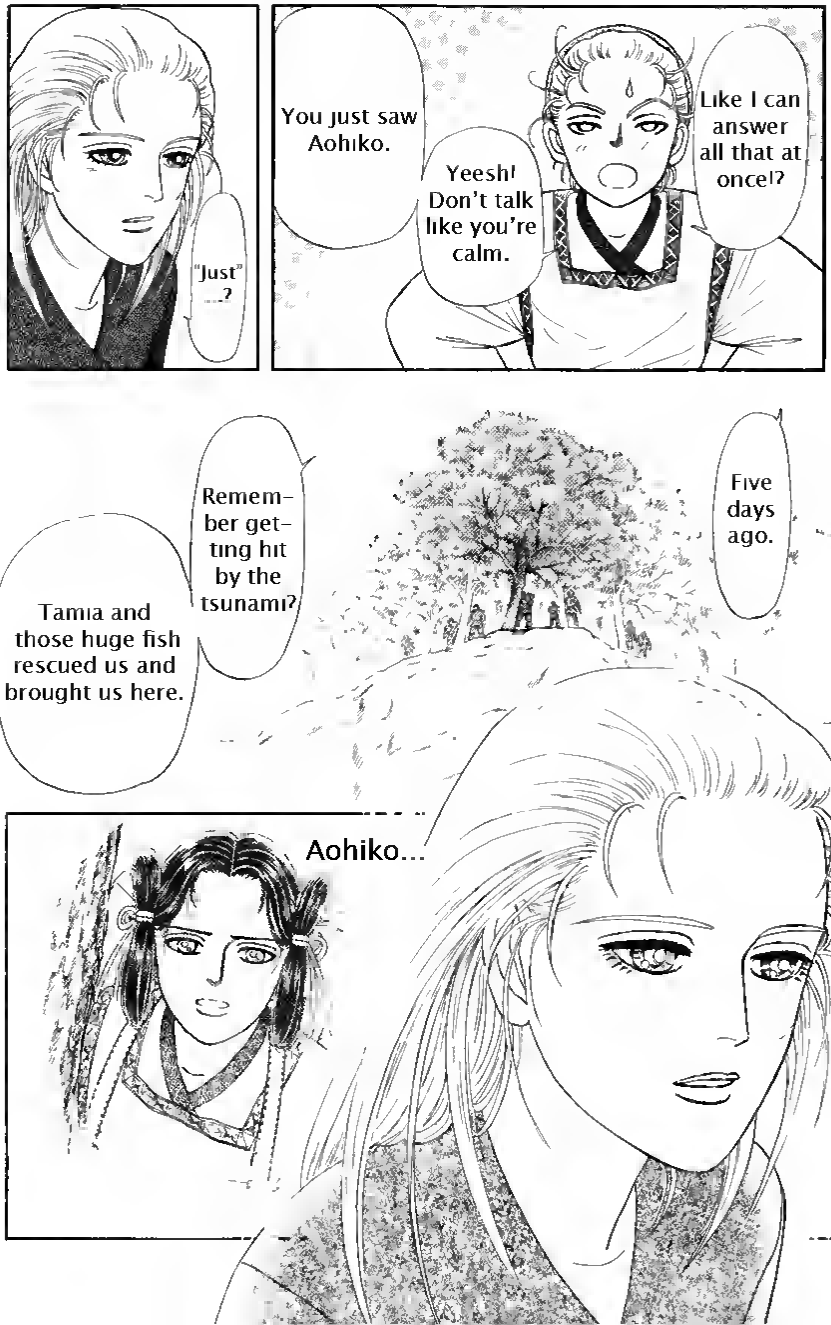
How pretty...

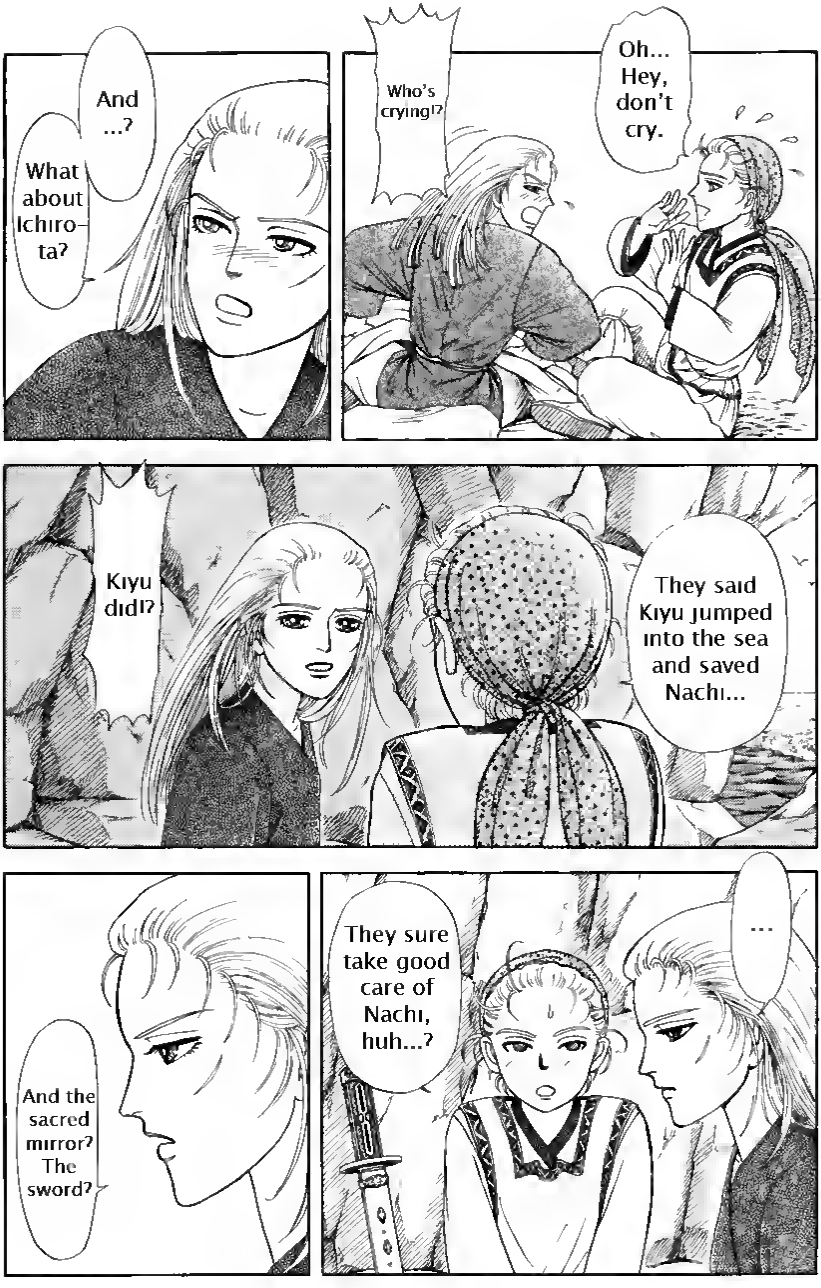
How pretty...


Sometimes, the world...
...is so beautiful it makes me want to cry...
I wanted you to see that...
He wanted...
...to see it with me...
That's what it sounded like.
Yoko hated him... feared him...
...but she was drawn to him... To Kiyu...


Katsu-
ra....
Katsu-
ra!
Katsu-
raaa!


...
You just didn't wake up...
I... I thought you were gone.
You jerk!
Agh... Dizzy
I was so worried I couldn't even sleep!
I was having a pretty good dream...
Sorry ...
Where's Ichiro-ta?
Where's Tomin?
How long was I asleep?
Where are we?
Why did we survive?


"Just"...?
You just saw Aohiko.
Yeesh! Don't talk like you're calm.
Like I can answer all that at once!?
Five days ago.
Remember getting hit by the tsunami?
Tamia and those huge fish rescued us and brought us here.
Aohiko...


And ...?
What about Ichiro-ta?
Who's crying!?
Oh... Hey, don't cry.
Kiyu did!?
They said Kiyu jumped into the sea and saved Nachi...
And the sacred mirror? The sword?
They sure take good care of Nachi, huh...?
...

Tamia and the fish did that, too?
They say the demon gods are still at the shore, looking for the mirror. Serves 'em right.
I washed 'em and dried 'em good
All here!
They found them for us.
Tamia's ...
And where is Tamia?
I'm not!
Don't cry.
... turned into an ocean-dweller ...
... Tamia ...

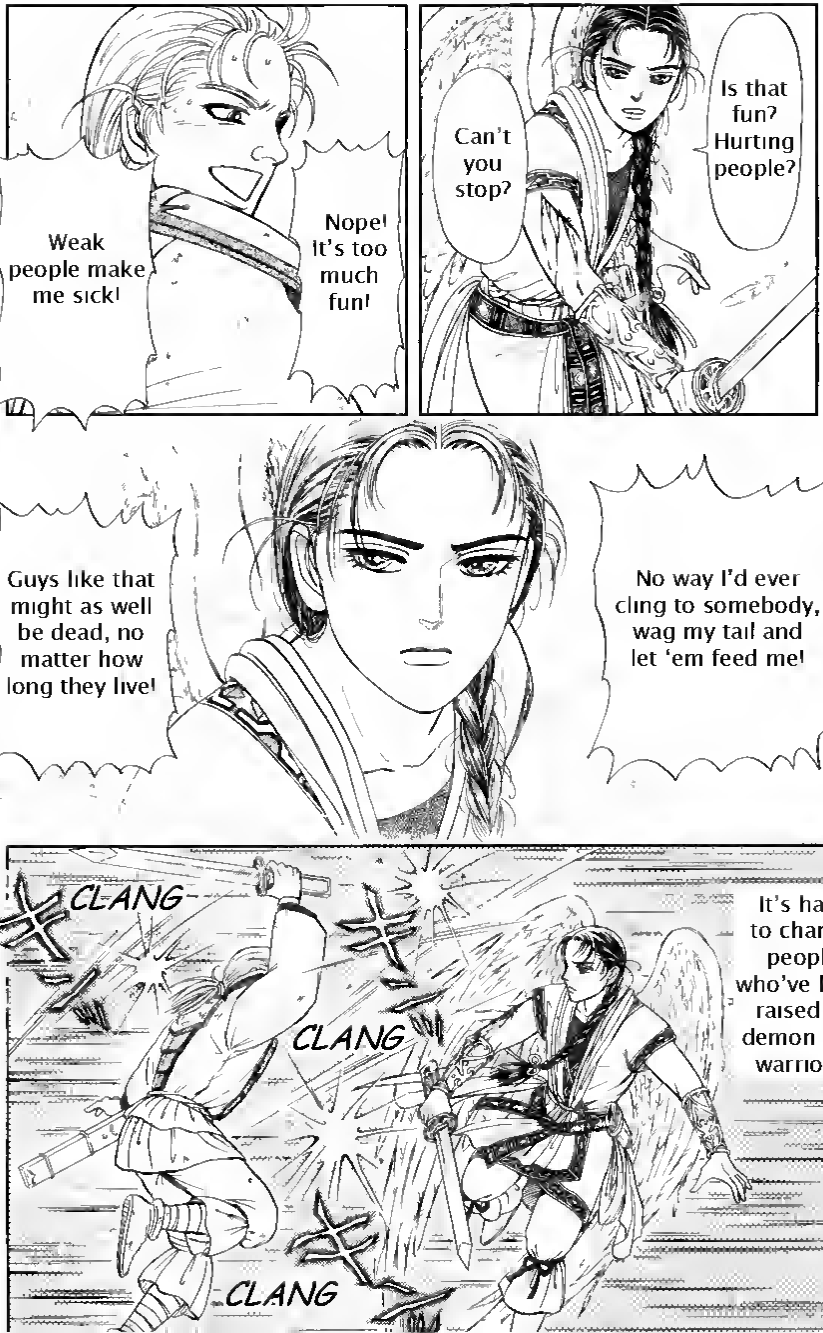
That, and seaweed for poultices...
She brings us food every day.
Your right leg!
Not me. You!
Let me see!
Are you hurt?
Oh...
That's the kinda lady you are, huh?
Even in pain, you can eat.
Really hungry.
I'm hungry, too.
Now that I've noticed it...
It really hurts...

Ne... Never mind me...
PANT PANT PANT
Grand-pa! Hurry!
HEH HEH HEH HEH
No-ooo!
No!
PANT PANT
Leave me and run! Go!
You almost made it to the village of Fuji.
Too bad.
Grand-pa!
Grand-pa!

FLAP
GASP
Ohh!
Ah ...
Takaya! There you are.
I was waiting for you!

He's so young he can't even see the difference in our skill levels.
That blood lust doesn't suit him...
Diiiiie!
Ye... Yes, sir.
Call Lord Amane's name and go.
CLANG
CLANG

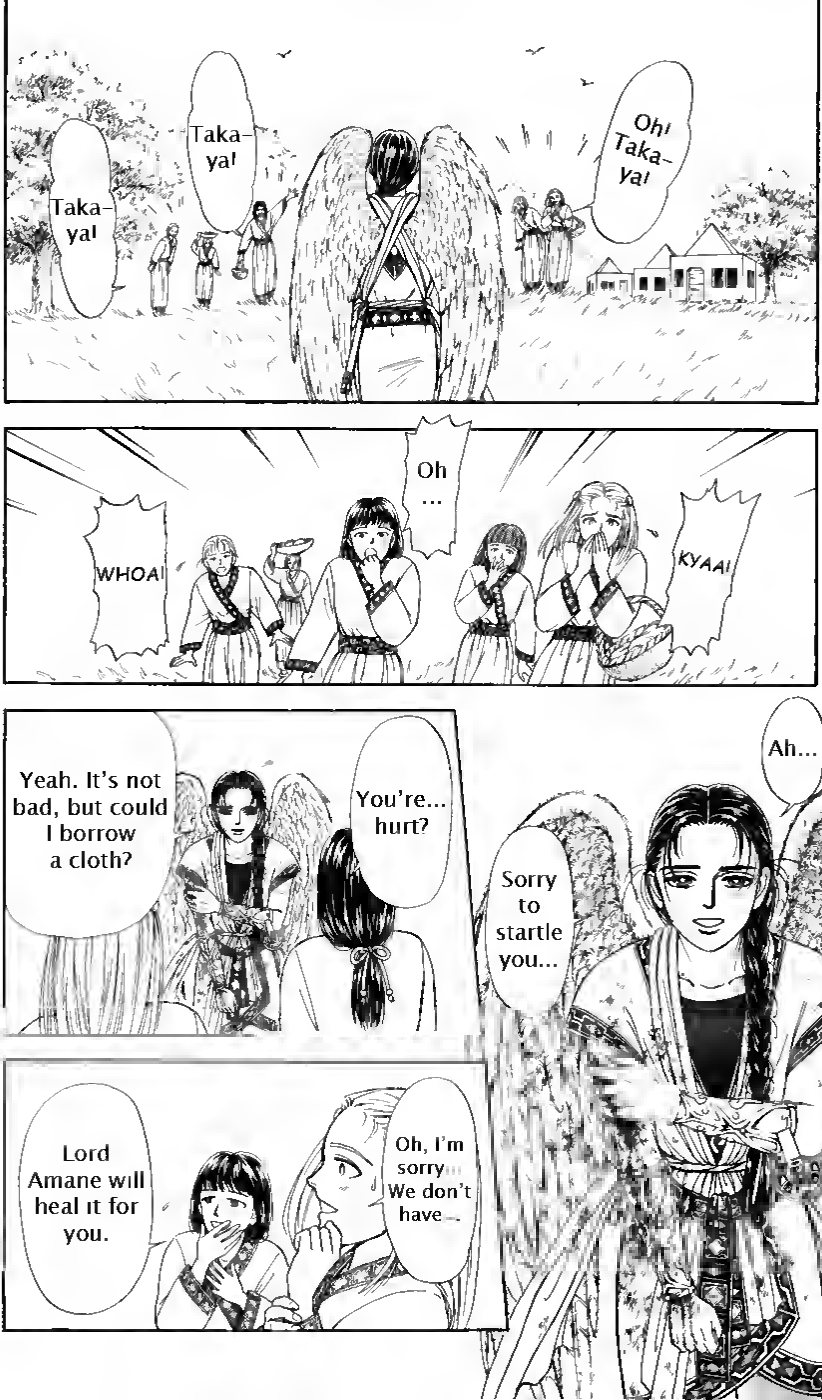
GREAK
I don't want to kill you.
Why? You're so skinny there'd be nothing worth eating if you were a bird.
Shad-dup!
I don't suppose you'd convert to Lord Amane?
SNIK
CLANG
WAAA-ARGH!
SNIK
CLANG


Weak people make me sick!
Nope! It's too much fun!
Can't you stop?
Is that fun? Hurting people?
Guys like that might as well be dead, no matter how long they live!
No way I'd ever cling to somebody, wag my tail and let 'em feed me!
CLANG
CLANG
CLANG
It's hard to change people who've been raised as demon god warriors.

SKASH
That's because the pleasure they take in destruction didn't come from the demon gods.
GWAH
It was already there, in their hearts. They only drew it out.

Is this all can do...?
He was still just a kid...
Help me...
Toko...

You hesita-te...
...too much ...

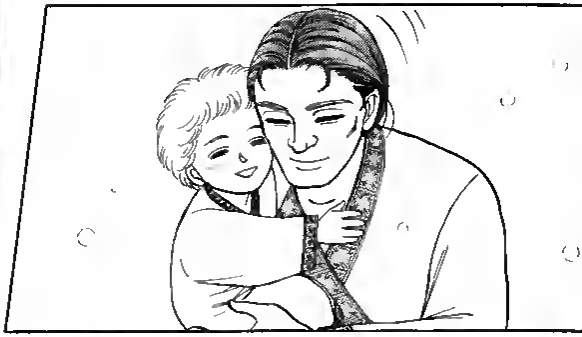

Taka-ya!
Taka-ya!
Oh! Taka-ya!
Oh...
WHOA!
KYAA!
Yeah. It's not bad, but could I borrow a cloth?
You're... hurt?
Ah...
Sorry to startle you...
Lord Amane will heal it for you.
Oh, I'm sorry... We don't have...

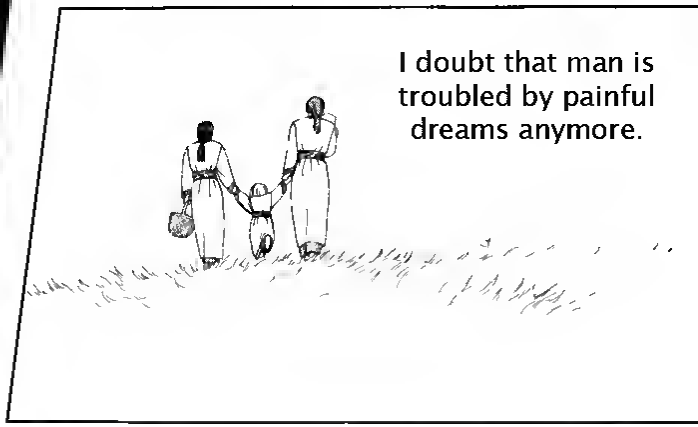
I don't mind ...
...but some-how
LICK
Pray. That's all it will take to make it better.
Do take care ...
Hurry to the temple, please ...
I'm sorry.
You're protecting the village for us, but we...
Oh... Sarai.
Kusuto would like you to stay at the crystal shrine tonight...
And um...
You're scared of me too, aren't you?
N... no...
There's an identi-cal outfit waiting for you.

Could I meet the people who used to be demon god warriors?
Yes!?
Sara?
I see... All right.
Only... If you meet them... Please refrain from asking about their time as demon god warriors.
Oh... Yes.
They wanted to forget and be reborn. That's why they relied on Lord Amane and came to us.
They've discarded their pasts and been reborn.
They don't remember it.
Huh?
But... that's ...
They don't remember?

Kusto's power erased their mem-mories or re-placed them with others.
After Kusuto went to sleep, Lord Amane did it herself...
Is it even possible to forget the past?
There's no other way to save them.
He took a new name, and now he's as you see
There. That man.
They all live in peace here.

"I want to make a beautiful world."





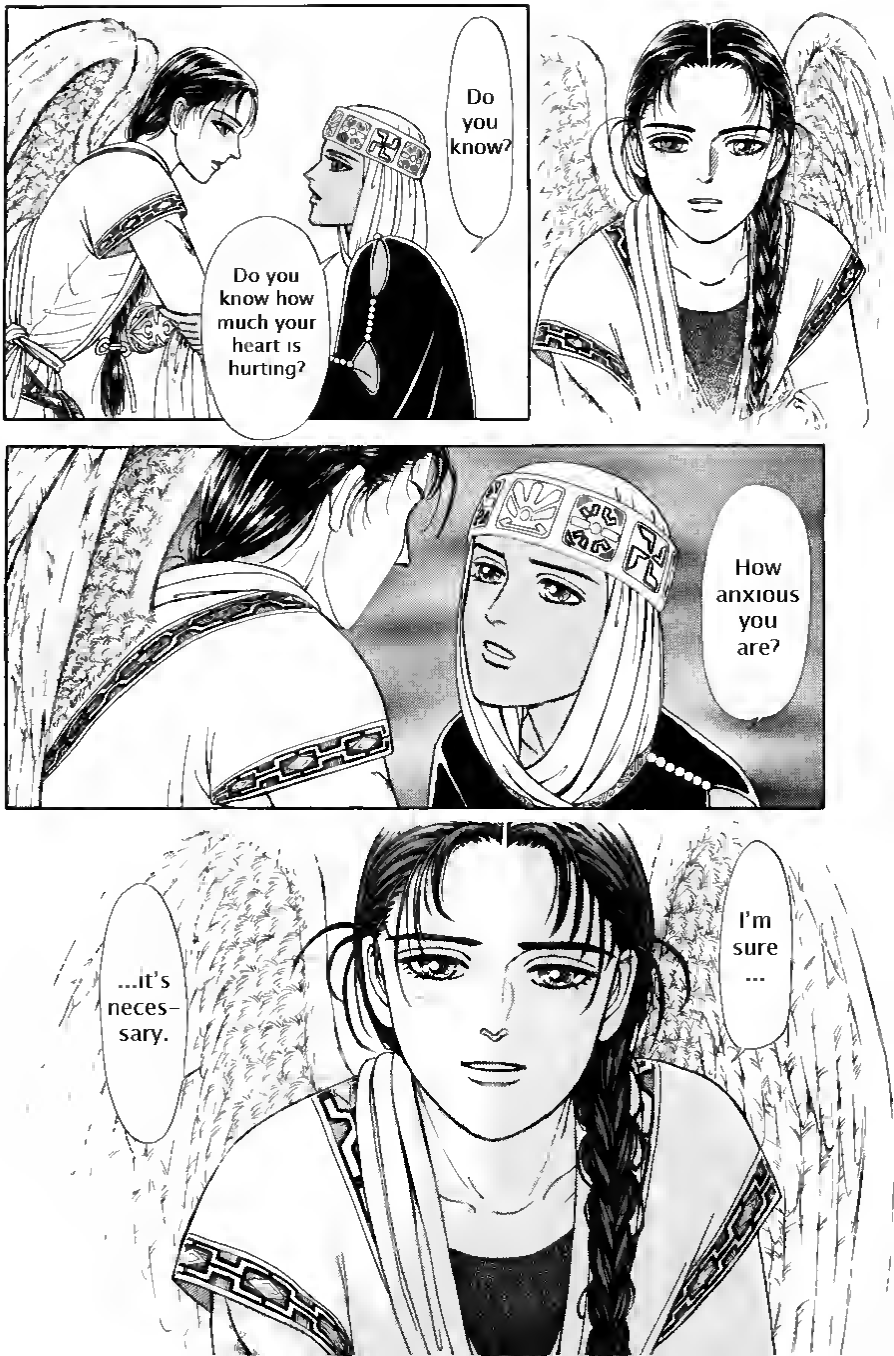
"...With you..."

You call this a shallow wound...?

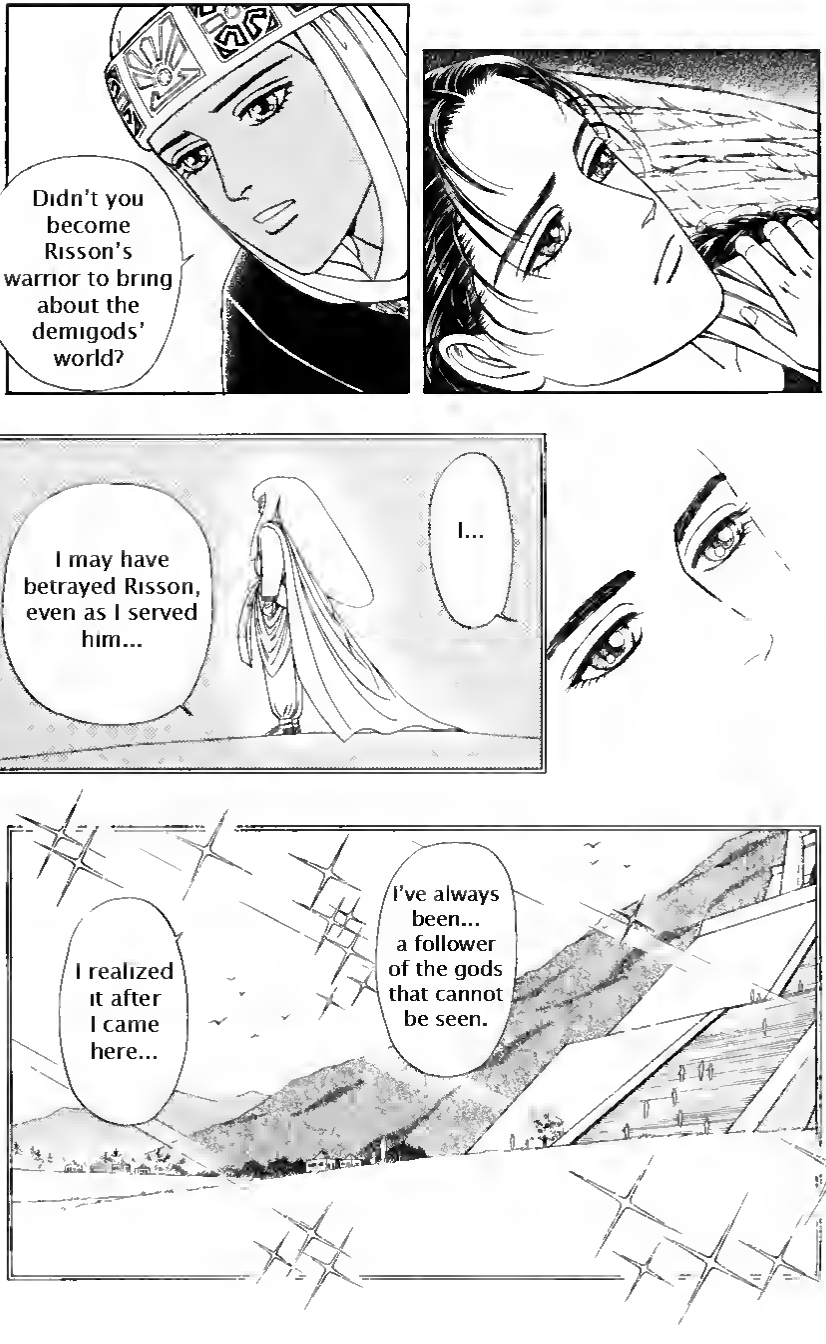
Your hesitation wounds you, eats away at you.

Your hesitation is hurting you.

He was still just a kid, so I...

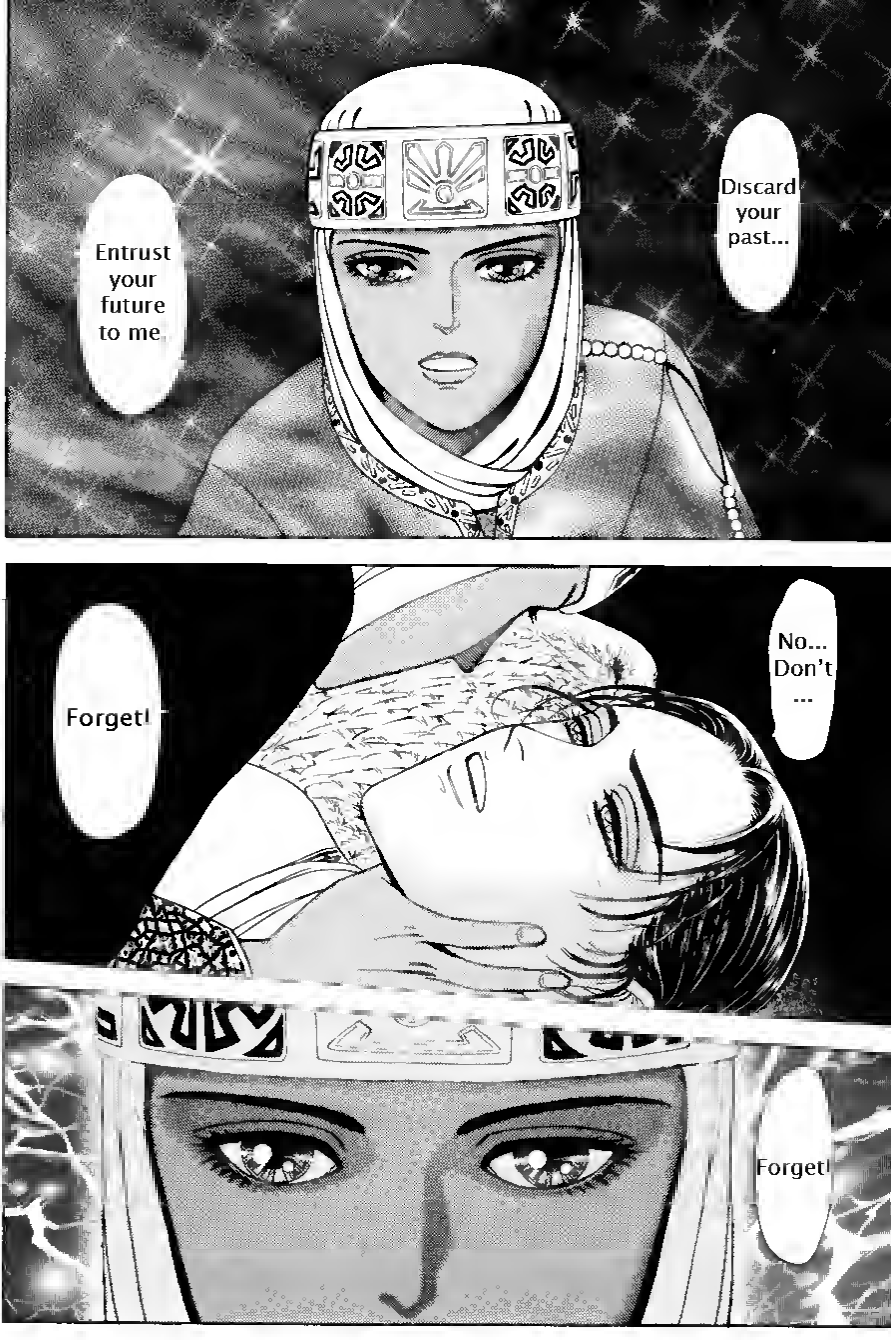

Do you know?
Do you know how much your heart is hurting?
How anxious you are?
I'm sure ...
...it's necessary.

FWUMP
YANK
Kusu-to...?
If you believe in Lord Amane and entrust everything to her, your heart's wounds will be healed...
You'll feel better.
You won't be hurt any more...


Didn't you become Risson's warrior to bring about the demigods' world?
I may have betrayed Risson, even as I served him...
I...
I realized it after I came here...
I've always been... a follower of the gods that cannot be seen.

What ...
...does that mean?
Do you mean you can't embrace Lord Amane...?
The gods that cannot be seen abandoned your people.
There's a lot I don't understand.
But their teachings will never abandon us.
Not even me...
Not even one with a demon headband...

That... girl...?
...
Kusu-to?
You are a double-edged sword.
Forget ...

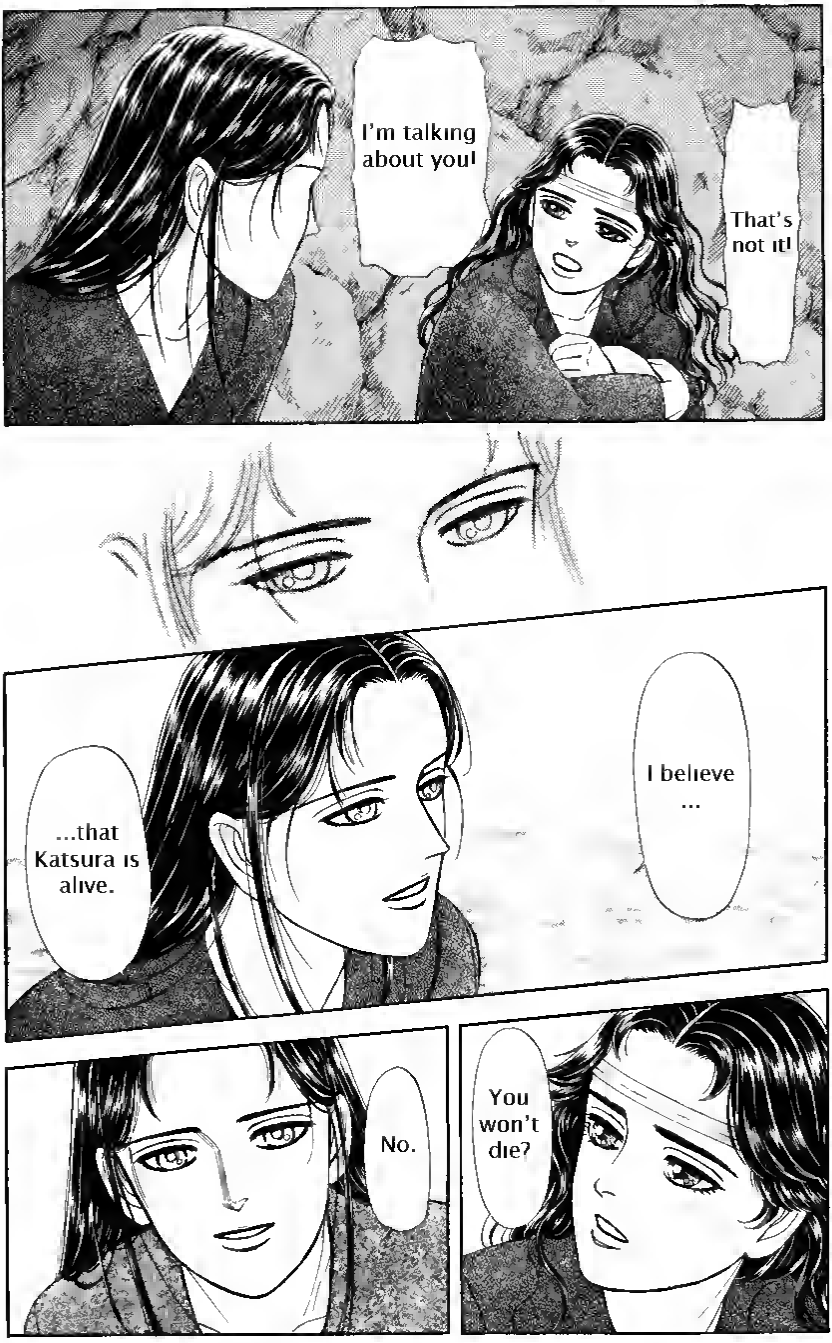

Entrust your future to me
Discard your past...
Forget!
No... Don't ...
Forget!

Forget ...
Perfect Mamana ...
You belong with me.

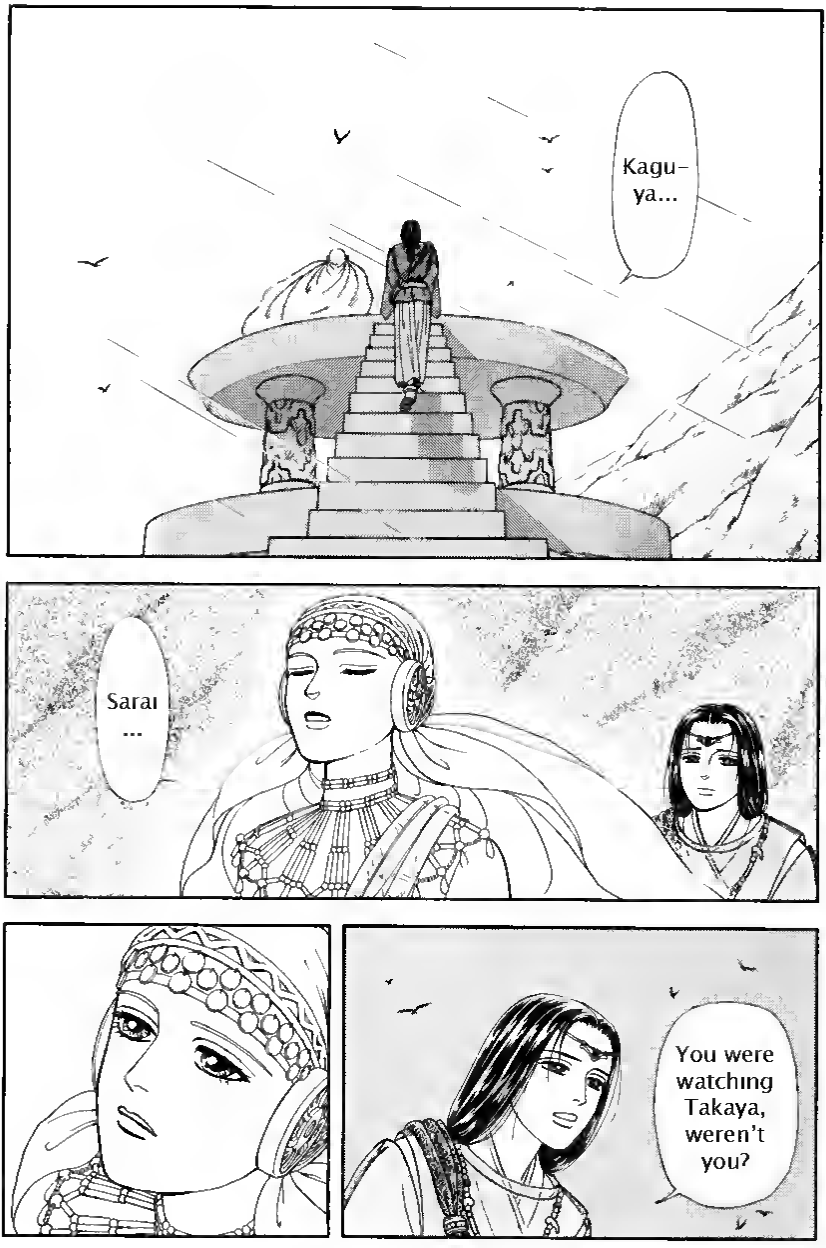
Taka-
ya!
Mm
...
You
were
drea-
ming,
right?
Toko
—

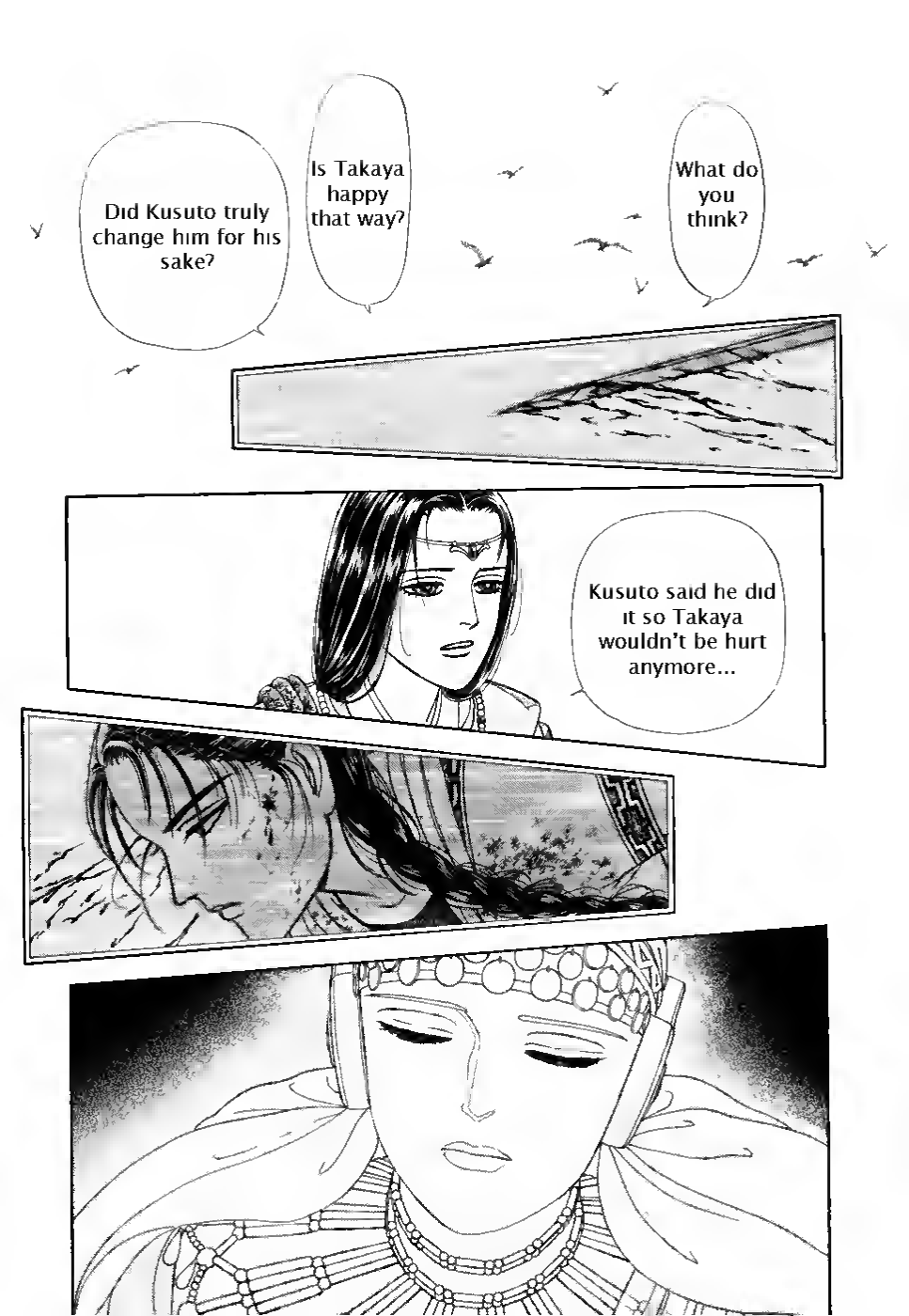
Go and see Takaya.
Go to Fuji, Toko.
Kiyu's intentions don't matter. For you, the most important thing is seeing Takaya.
Aohi-ko...
You'll die...
Aohi-ko...
But...
But...

I'm right, aren't I? You'll go to Nachi to set me free!
...you'll die...
If I go to Fuji...
...but I'll lop off a limb or two.
If we fought for real, I might lose...
I won't let Nachi touch him.
My death will mean letting you go, so I doubt he'll let me be killed.
Kiyu loves you...

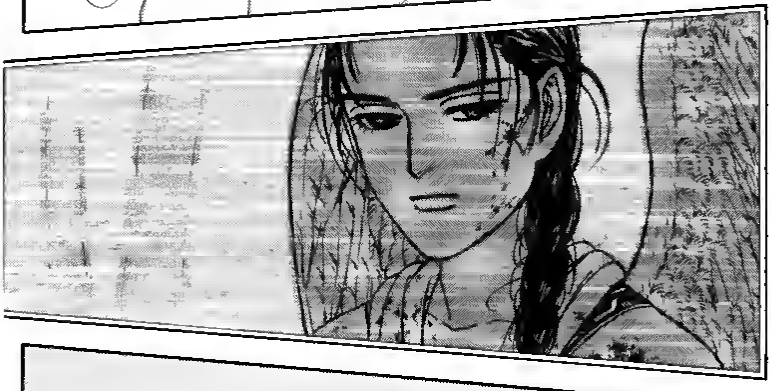

I'm talking about you!
That's not it!
I believe ...
...that Katsura is alive.
No.
You won't die?

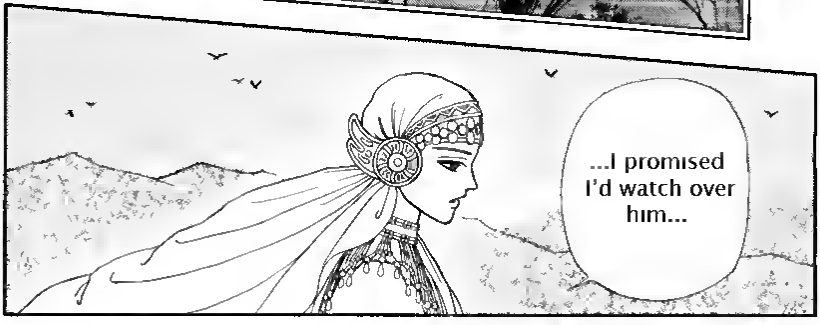
Aohi-ko!
I'm worried ...
I... I want to see Takaya.
I'm sorry ...
You dum-my.
I'm sorry...

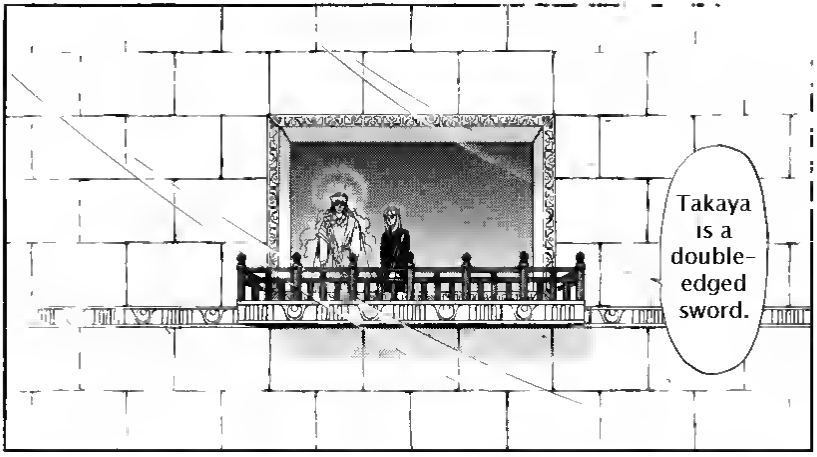

Kagu-
ya...
Sarai
...
You were
watching
Takaya,
weren't
you?

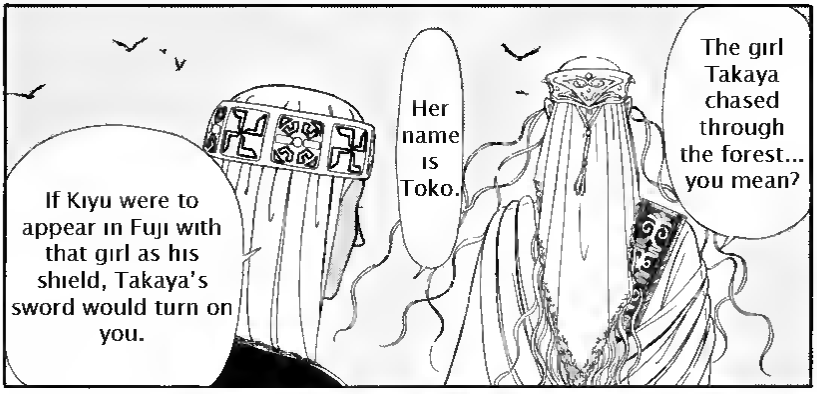

Did Kusuto truly change him for his sake?
Is Takaya happy that way?
What do you think?
Kusuto said he did it so Takaya wouldn't be hurt anymore...

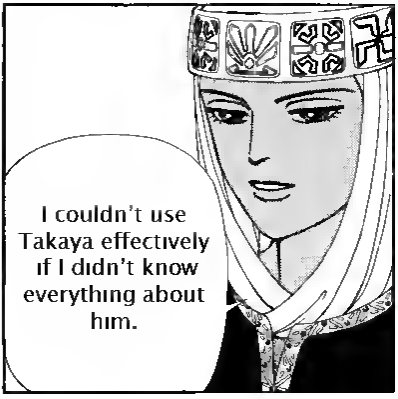
True. I doubt Takaya will ever be hurt again.
But...
Kagu-ya...




...I promised I'd watch over him...

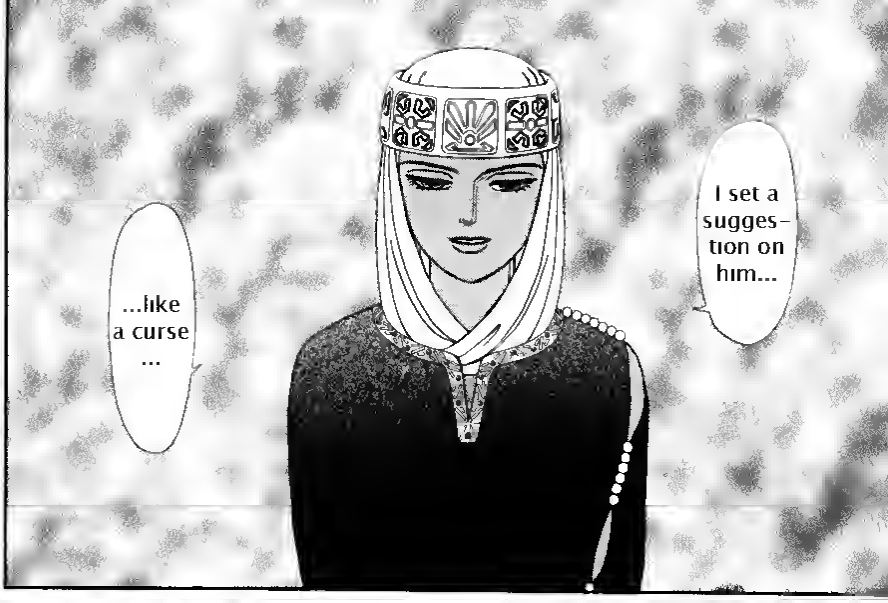

Takaya is a double-edged sword.


If Kiyu were to appear in Fuji with that girl as his shield, Takaya's sword would turn on you.
Her name is Toko.
The girl Takaya chased through the forest... you mean?


I couldn't use Takaya effectively if I didn't know everything about him.

You made him tell you everything.

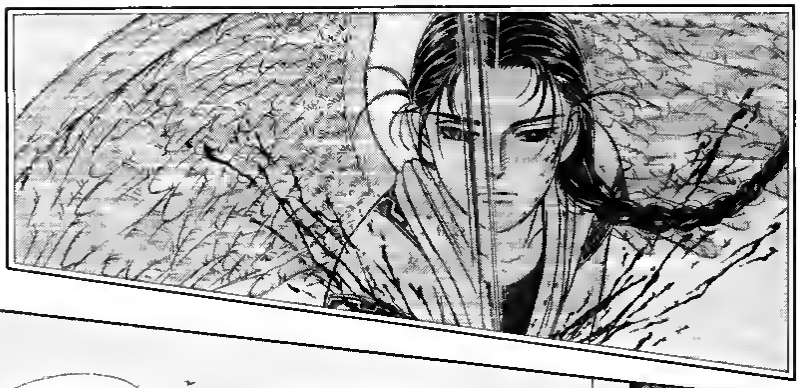
This is all for your sake, Lord Amane... For the village... For its people...
Kusu-to...
The only one I hold irreplaceable is you, Lord Amane.
I thought Takaya was someone irreplaceable to you.
I cursed him
Takaya is just...


I set a suggestion on him...
...like a curse ...

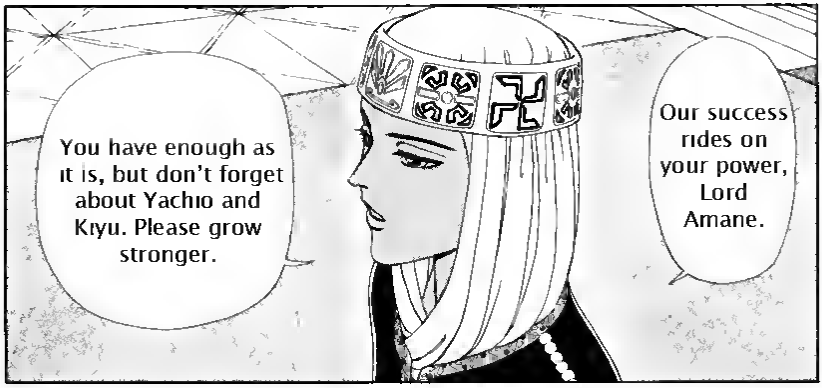
So that he can never betray us.

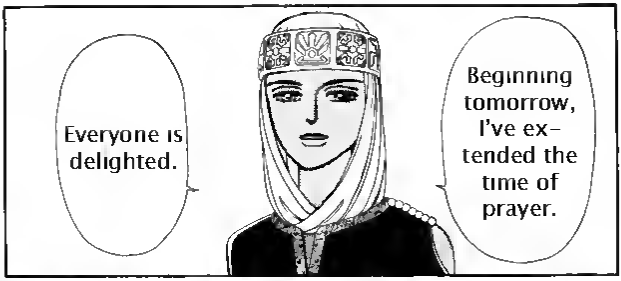
You love others as if you hate them.
Takaya... and other people too...

Leave Takaya to me.
You follow me because you wish for mankind's survival, do you not?
He won't be wounded. He's performing his role calmly.
He doesn't hesitate now.



As soon as we have succeeded, return Takaya's memories to him.

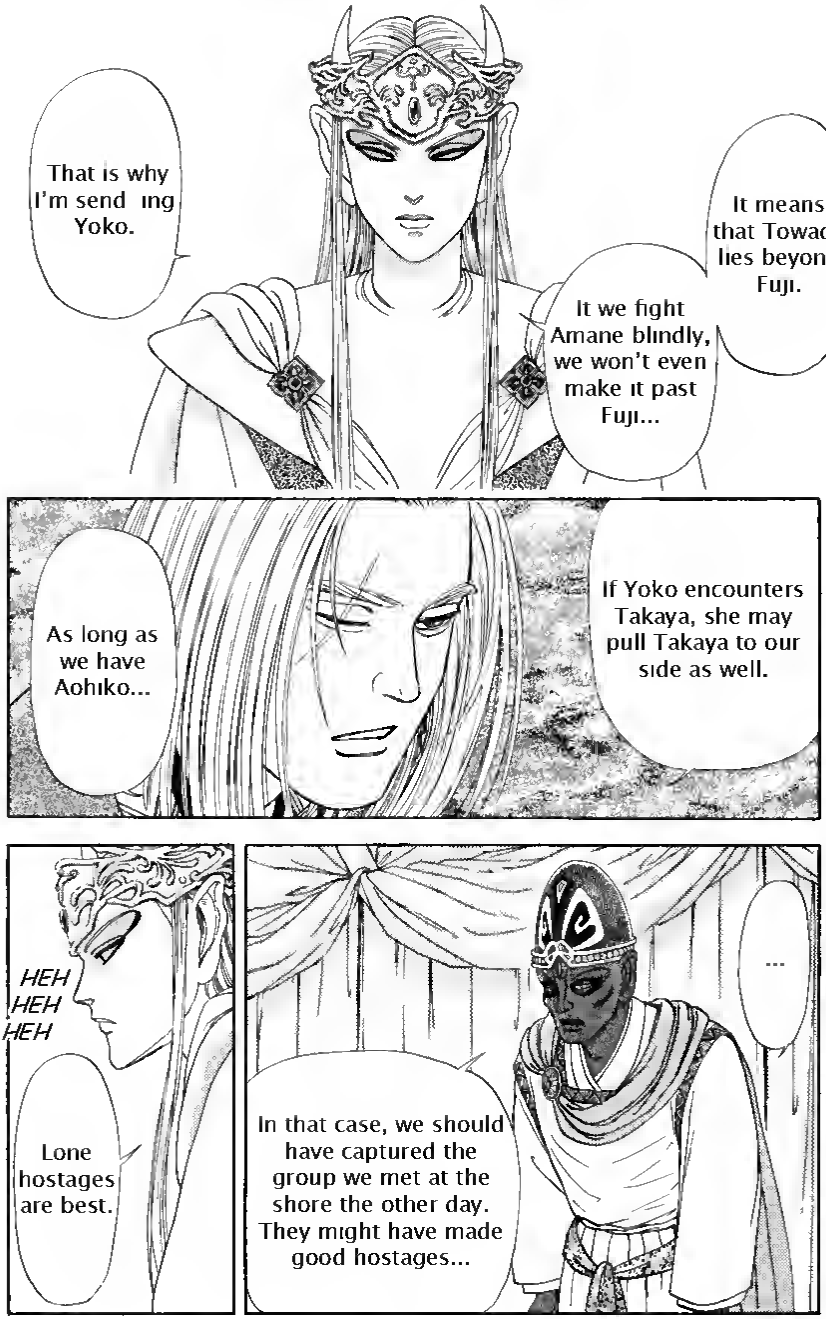

You have enough as it is, but don't forget about Yachio and Kiyu. Please grow stronger.
Our success rides on your power, Lord Amane.

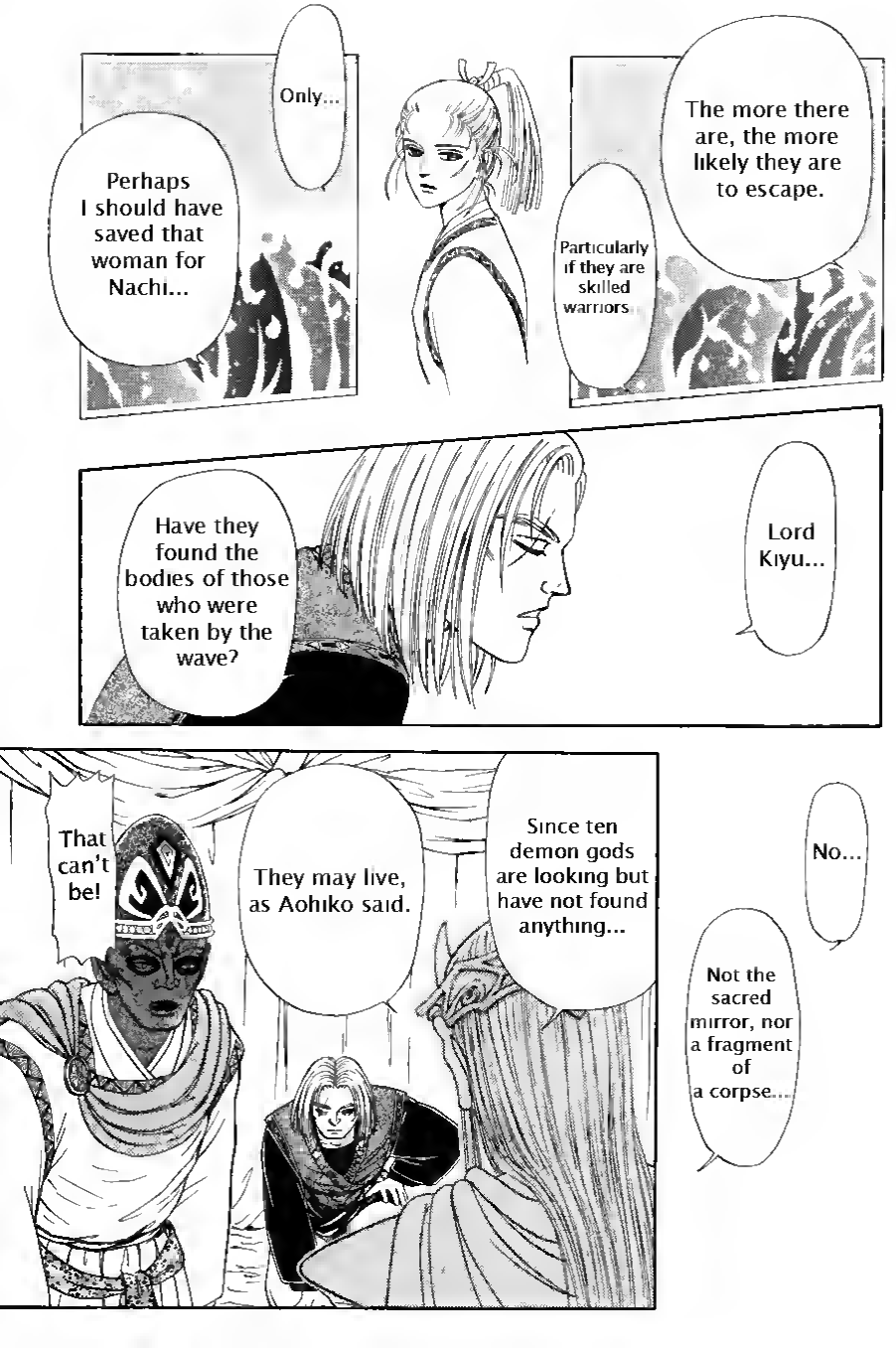

Everyone is delighted.
Beginning tomorrow, I've extended the time of prayer.

Why am I not like the other demigods...? Why am I like this...?
You say you don't know either, but...
Were it not for your intelligence, the demigods would have continued to vanish.

Lord Kiyu! Please reconsi-der.
No doubt she will, and she'll inform on us...
Even if Yoko manages to infiltrate the village of Fuji, there's no guarantee she won't betray us.
Aohiko is here.

Yoko won't betray us.
But... But sir...
The three gods I sent to Mount Towada encountered Risson and were erased soon after.
No...
He doesn't have enough power for that anymore.
By Risson!?
Then it was him before, too!?


That is why I'm send ing Yoko.
It means that Towada lies beyond Fuji.
It we fight Amane blindly, we won't even make it past Fuji...
As long as we have Aohiko...
If Yoko encounters Takaya, she may pull Takaya to our side as well.
HEH HEH HEH
Lone hostages are best.
In that case, we should have captured the group we met at the shore the other day. They might have made good hostages...
...


Only...
Perhaps I should have saved that woman for Nachi...
The more there are, the more likely they are to escape.
Particularly if they are skilled warriors
Lord Kiyu...
Have they found the bodies of those who were taken by the wave?
No...
Not the sacred mirror, nor a fragment of a corpse...
That can't be!
They may live, as Aohiko said.
Since ten demon gods are looking but have not found anything...

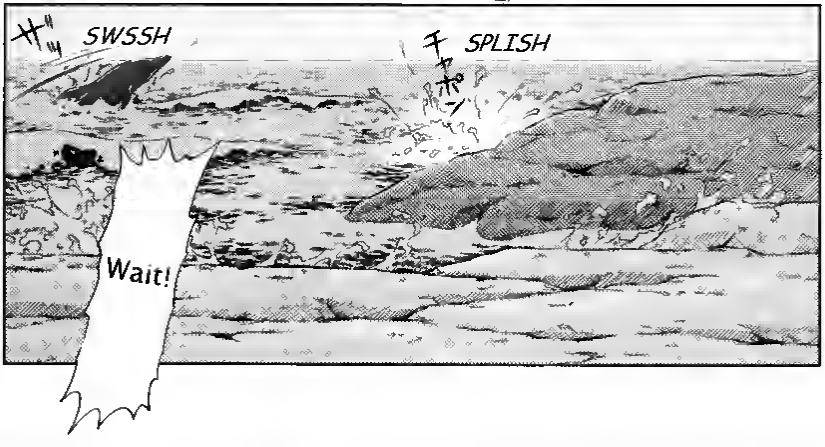
Whether it's hatred... or love...
If their survival is confirmed, Nachi may gain the power to live.
Good craves good. Evil craves evil.
...Greedily...
So much so that, without them, they cannot live...
Nachi is nearly a corpse now.
I did not wish to let him die like that...
But I do not wish him to die like this, either.

Once more...
Nachi dreams of losing that woman, night after night...
Over and over...
All because he failed to kill her by his own hand...

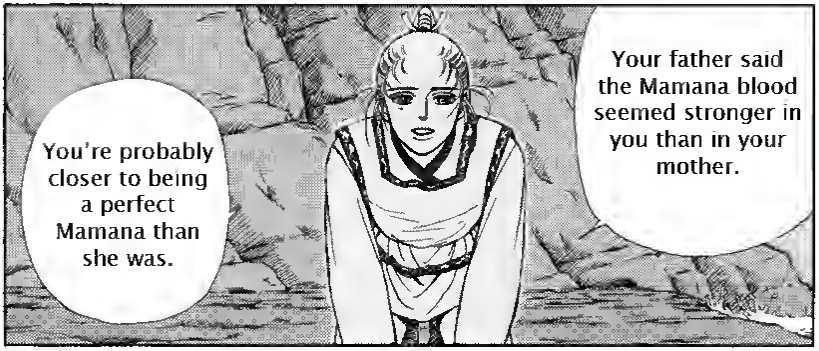
Ow-ww!
She could wait till after dawn to practice walking...
She's pushing it again.
YAWN...
Hurry up and heal!
Argh!
SMACK
SMACK

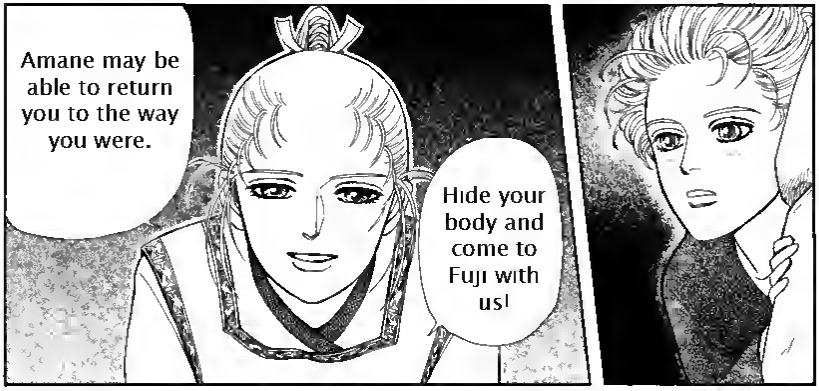
Whoa-whoa-whoa!
Ah...

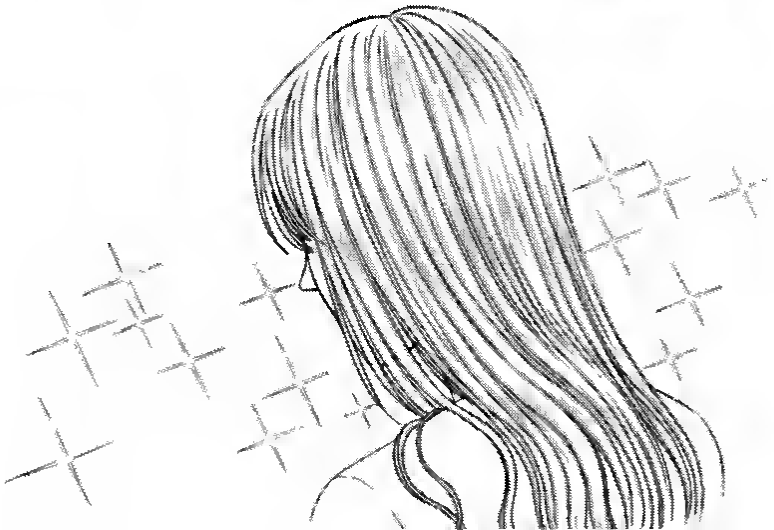
That's you, isn't it!?
Tamia!
WHUMP
OW!


SWSSH
SPLISH
Wait!

Please wait! Tamia!
Stay back!
...Tamia...
...The scales didn't reach my face...
But I've lost my human skin from my fingers to the tips of my toes.

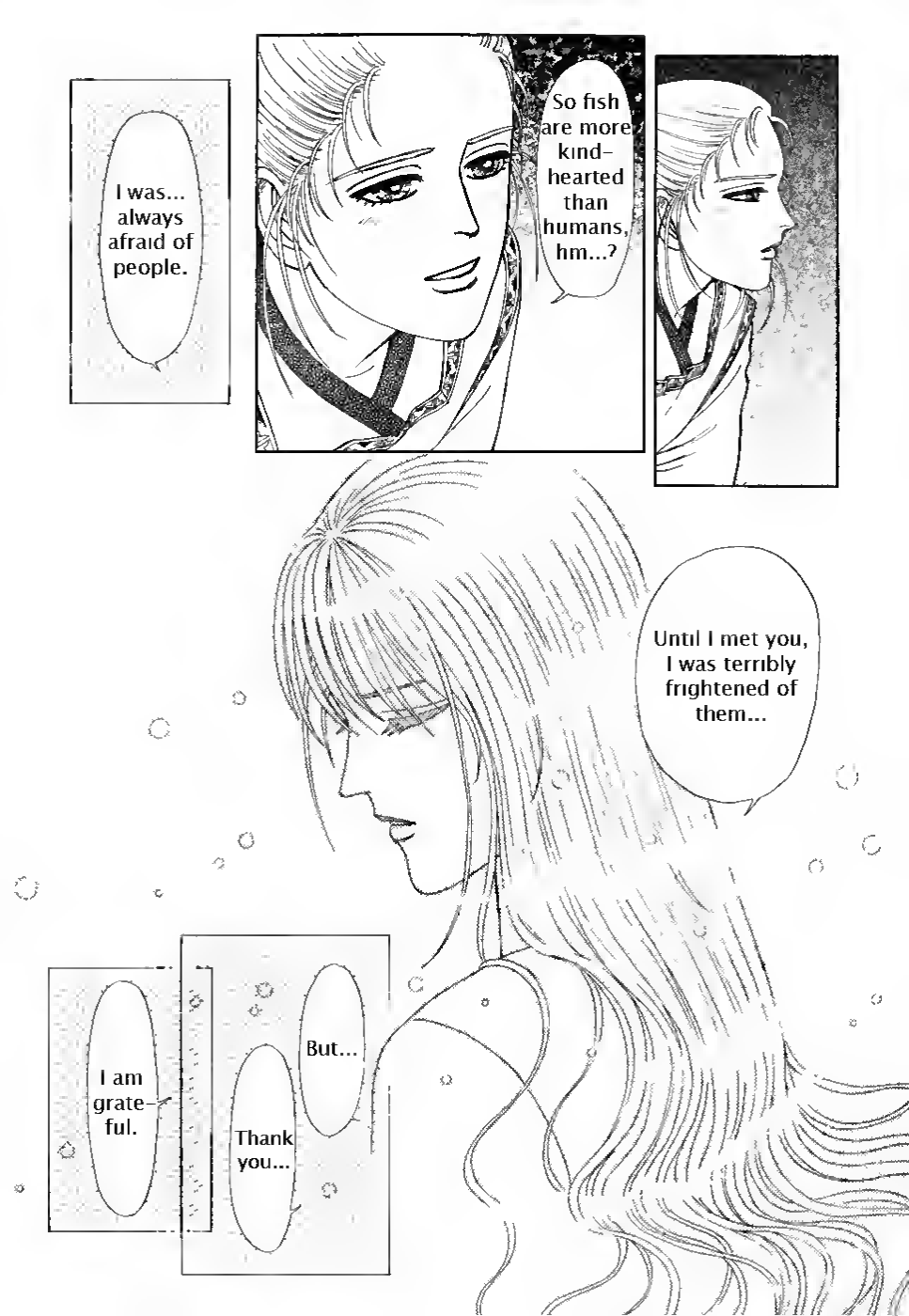

You're probably closer to being a perfect Mamana than she was.
Your father said the Mamana blood seemed stronger in you than in your mother.

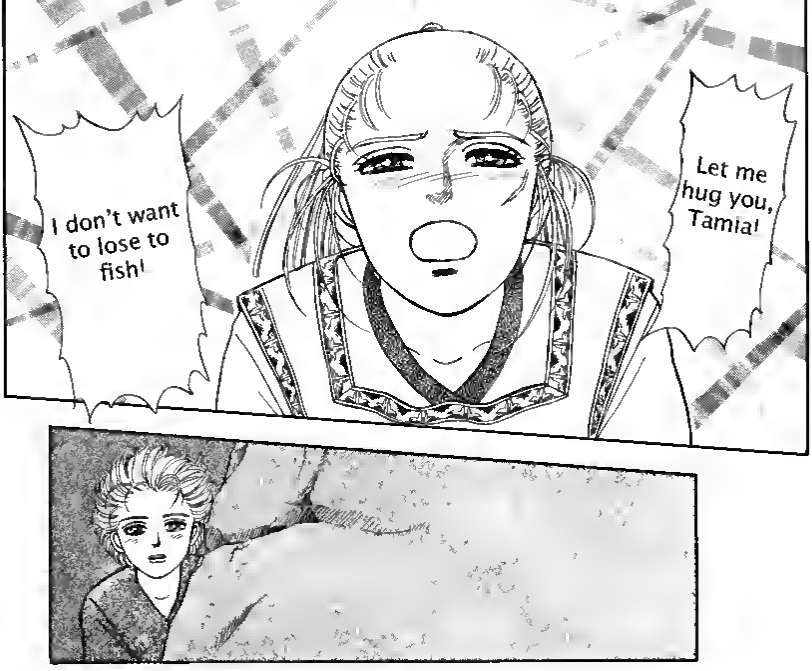

Amane may be able to return you to the way you were.
Hide your body and come to Fuji with us!

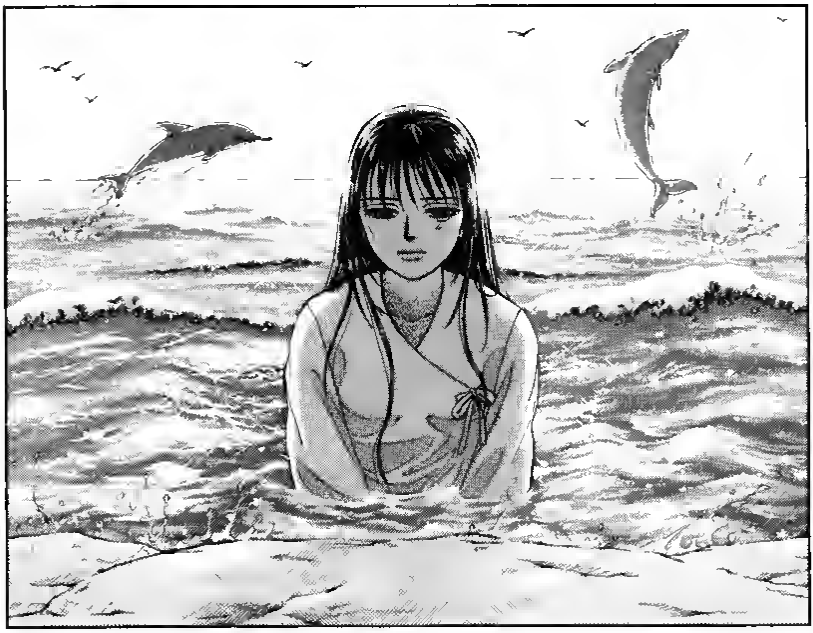


I... prefer the ocean.
FWOOOOSH
No... It's fine.
All alone ...?
Aren't you lonely, all alone!?

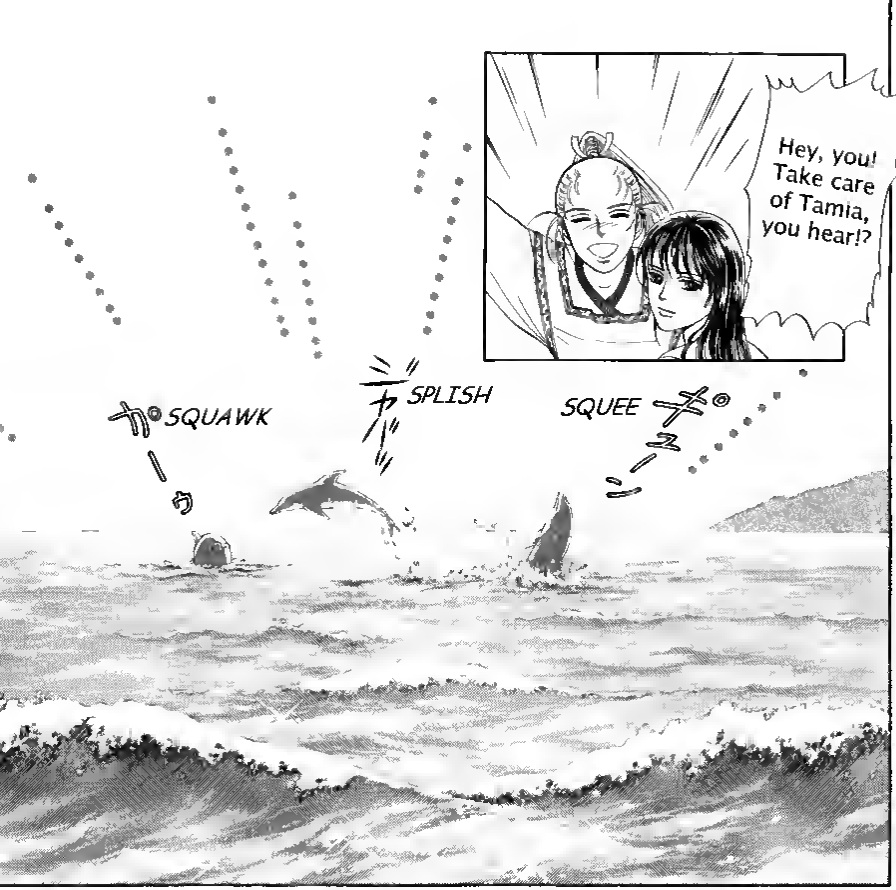
Those big fish.
I have friends.
...and they take good care of me.
They're intelligent ...
FWOOM
PLOOSH
SPLISH
Our forms are different, but they don't care. They took me in, and they protect me.


I was... always afraid of people.
So fish are more kind-hearted than humans, hm...?
Until I met you, I was terribly frightened of them...
But...
Thank you...
I am grate-ful.


I don't want to lose to fish!
Let me hug you, Tamia!



Your hair's grown.
Tamia ...
Just like Takaya's ...
Take good care of that pretty silver body.
Takaya can search for you from the sky.
As long as we're alive, we'll meet again someday.


Hey, you! Take care of Tamia, you hear!?
SQUAWK
SPLISH
SQUEE

I thank you, too. Hundreds of times...
Me too...

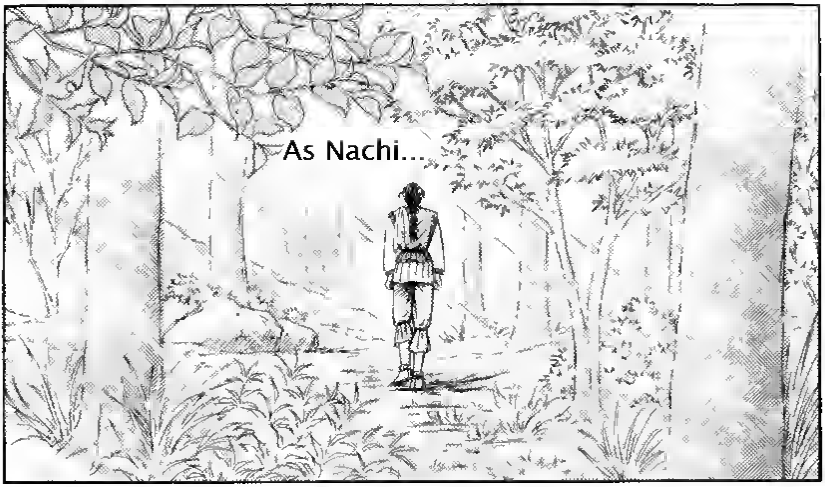
SNAP
I wanted to talk
I was waiting for you.
SPLISH SPLISH
I don't.

Actual-
ly...
I don't even know what to say.
I wanted to tell you...
But...
Even then, I don't really know, but...
I'm going to Fuji...
...on Kiyu's orders ...

Just don't bring him back here
I'll cut him down without blinking.
I'm going ...
...to see Taka-ya...
I hope you do.
Ichiro-ta...

I threw that one away.
I have another name, too.
You have to!
Accept Ichirota.
Don't!
Why?

Entrust all to Amane, forget my past, live peacefully at Fuji?
You mean I should turn back to the demigods?
What if I do?
If you can do that, go ahead.
I plan to die as Nachi.



But I think I may like the Nachi who can do that...

It's lonely... It's sad...

He's able to say that with conviction.

Some can find peace in eternal darkness...

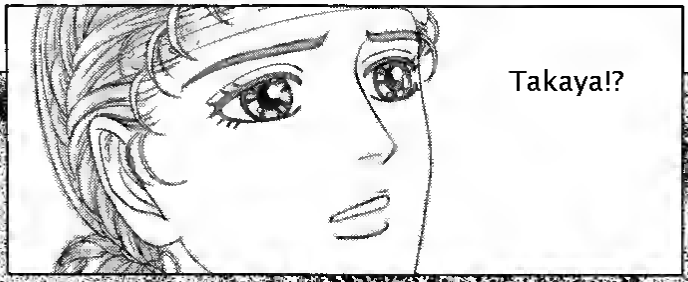
Everyone's different.

"If you can do it, go ahead."
Not now that I've accepted Yoko's past...
He's right... I'm sure I couldn't live in peace, either.
I mustn't forget those days of blood as long as I live...
It's my past now, too.

GASP
Midal
WOOSH

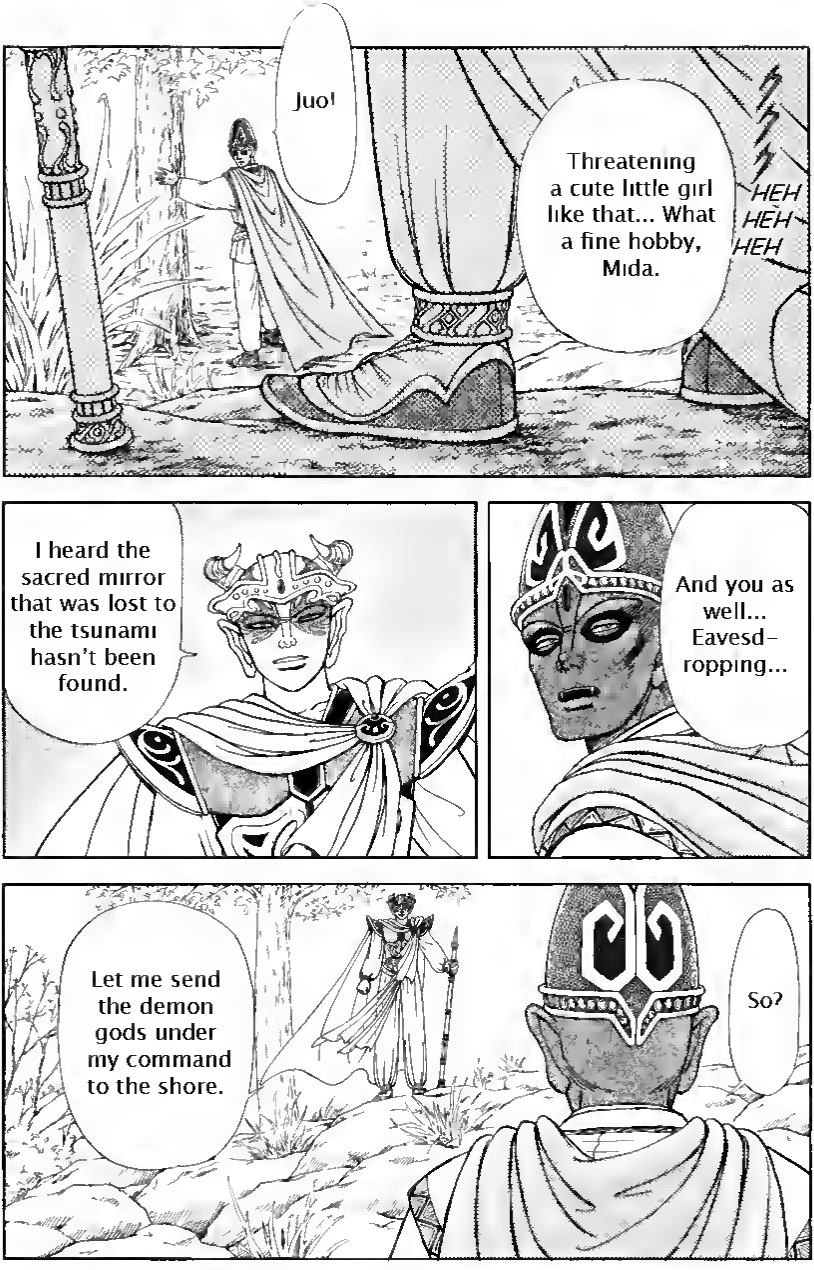
A few parting words...
Listen ...
If you show the slightest sign of betrayal, I will use Nachi to kill Aohiko.
Aohiko's life already belongs to Nachi. Even Kiyu won't blame him for it.
No matter how fond Kiyu is of you, I'll show you no mercy!
Don't forget that.
Your role is to find the secret of Amane's power and to bring Takaya to us.

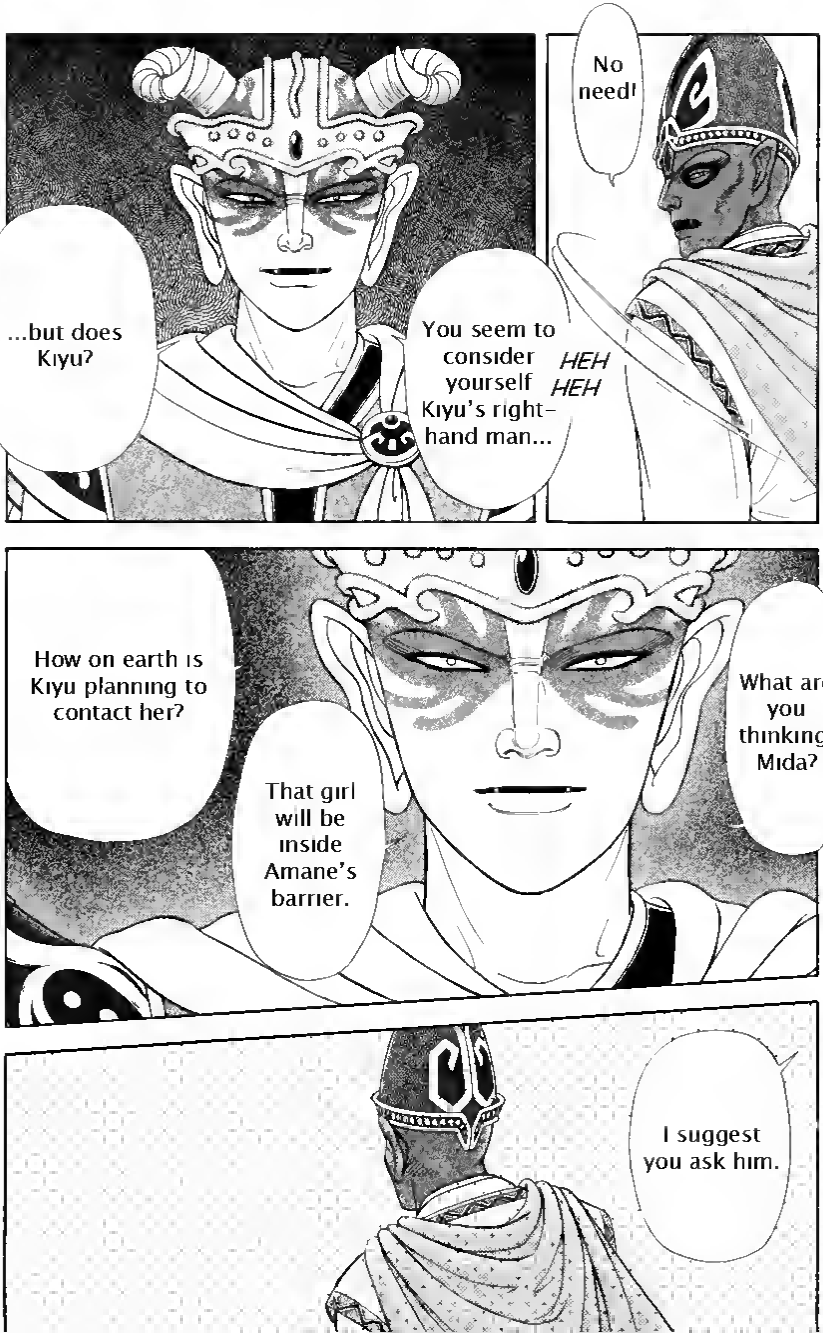
Takaya has killed countless warriors in the forest of illusory mists.
So many he could well be a demon god warrior himself...

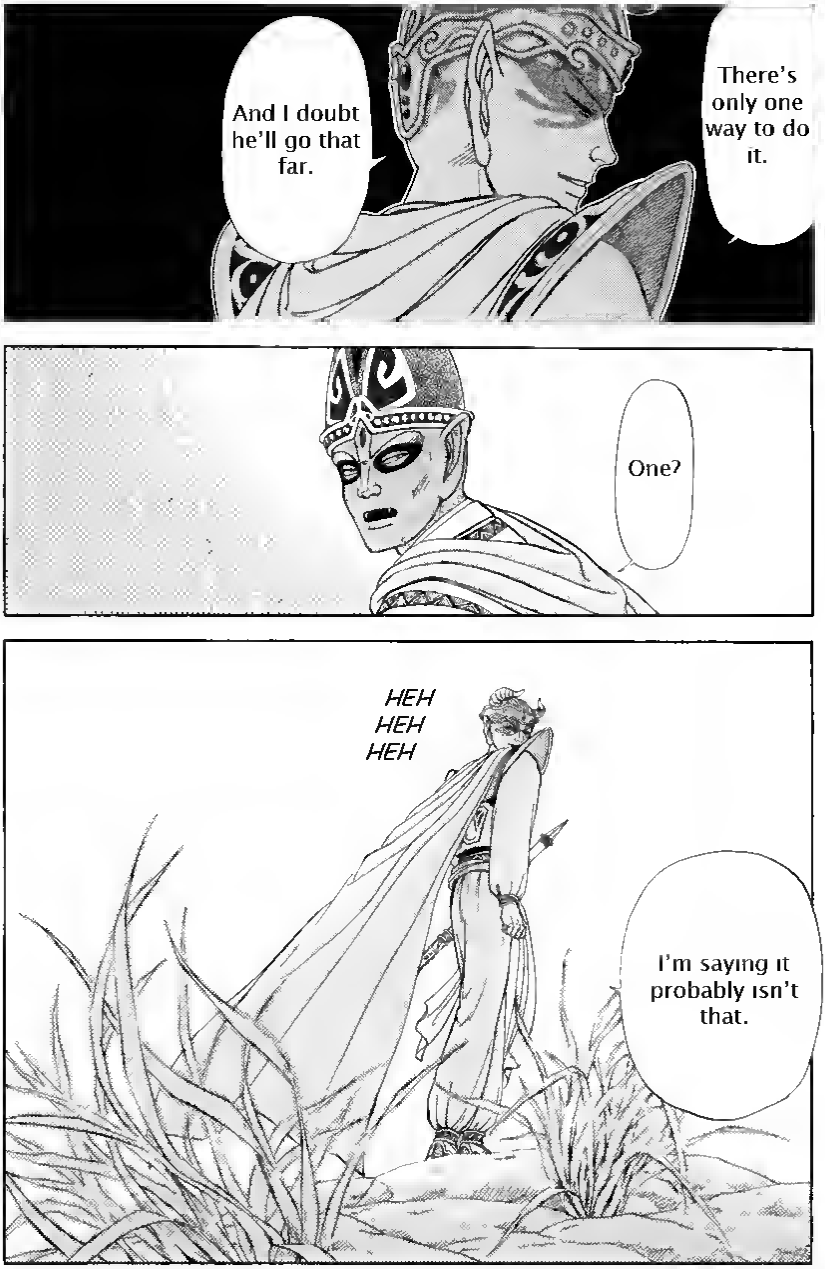

Takaya!?

Such acts grow from a dark pleasure in the heart.
He'll be as fine a warrior as Nachi.

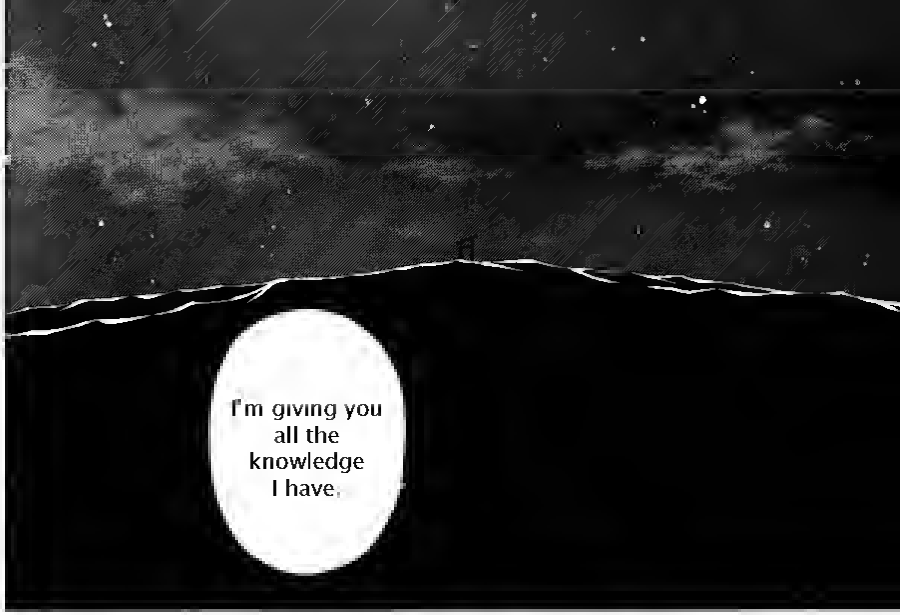
DASH
That rapturous pleasure...
I know you haven't forgotten, either.
Killing countless warriors!
Takaya!


Juo!
Threatening a cute little girl like that... What a fine hobby, Mida.
HEH HEH HEH
I heard the sacred mirror that was lost to the tsunami hasn't been found.
And you as well... Eavesdropping...
Let me send the demon gods under my command to the shore.
So?

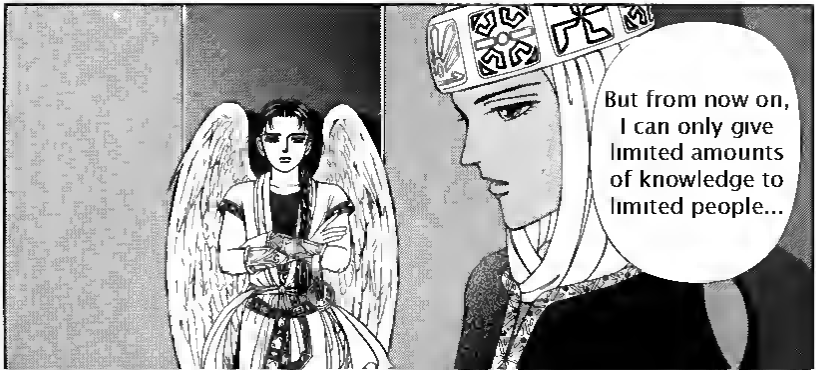

No need!
HEH HEH
You seem to consider yourself Kiyu's right-hand man...
...but does Kiyu?
What are you thinking, Mida?
That girl will be inside Amane's barrier.
How on earth is Kiyu planning to contact her?
I suggest you ask him.


And I doubt he'll go that far.
There's only one way to do it.
One?
HEH HEH HEH
I'm saying it probably isn't that.

Kiyu has always been shrouded in mystery.
Still, this has become rather entertaining.
HEH HEH HEH
Enjoy it, Mida.
No scheme of yours will work on Kiyu!

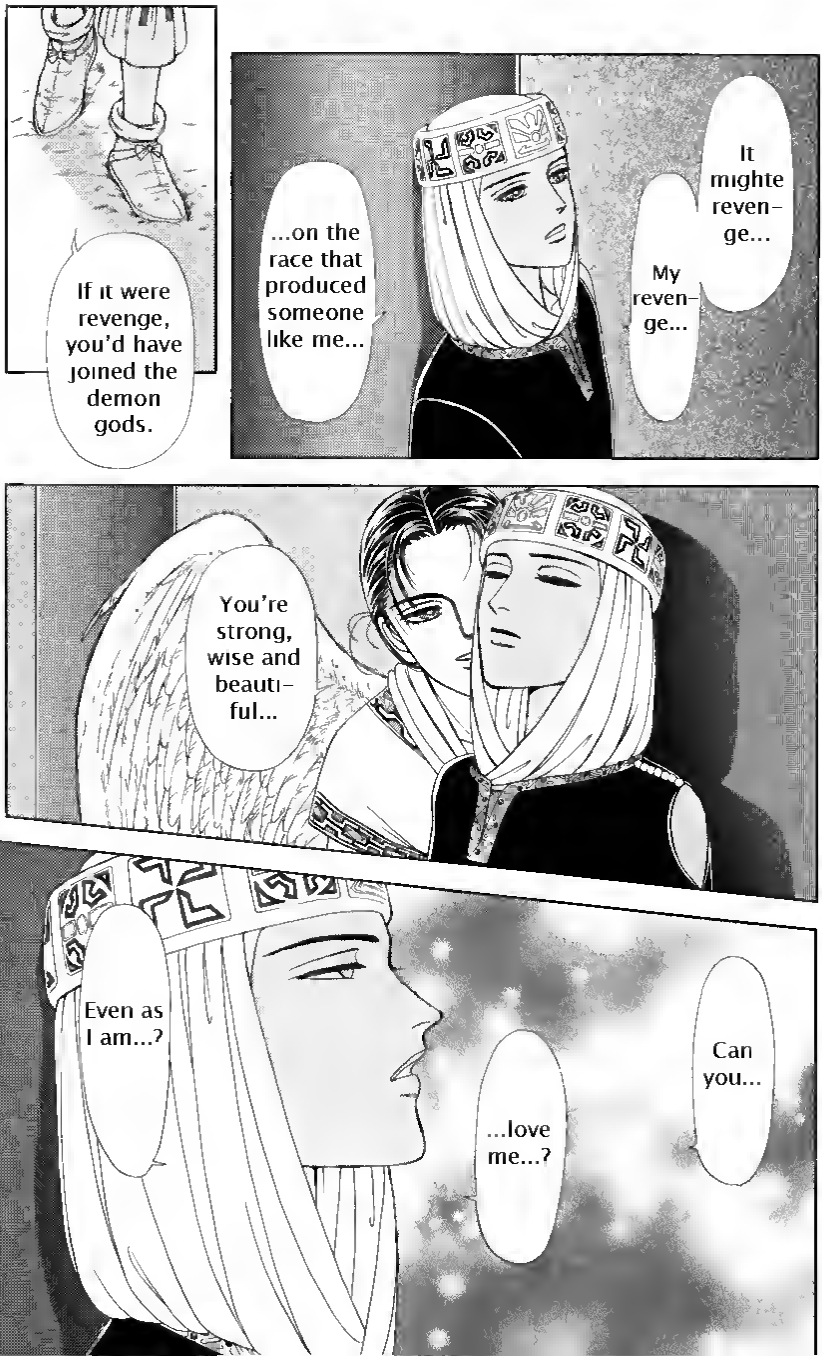

I'm giving you all the knowledge I have.

Don't be mean.
You're more intelligent than I expected. I'm relieved.


But from now on, I can only give limited amounts of knowledge to limited people...

Knowledge runs wild and leads to destruction...
Besides, if a god who grants everything exists, knowledge is unnecessary!
...for mankind to survive ...
...is the only way...
Coexis-tence with the only god...
Vague ...
Foolish ...
Weak ...

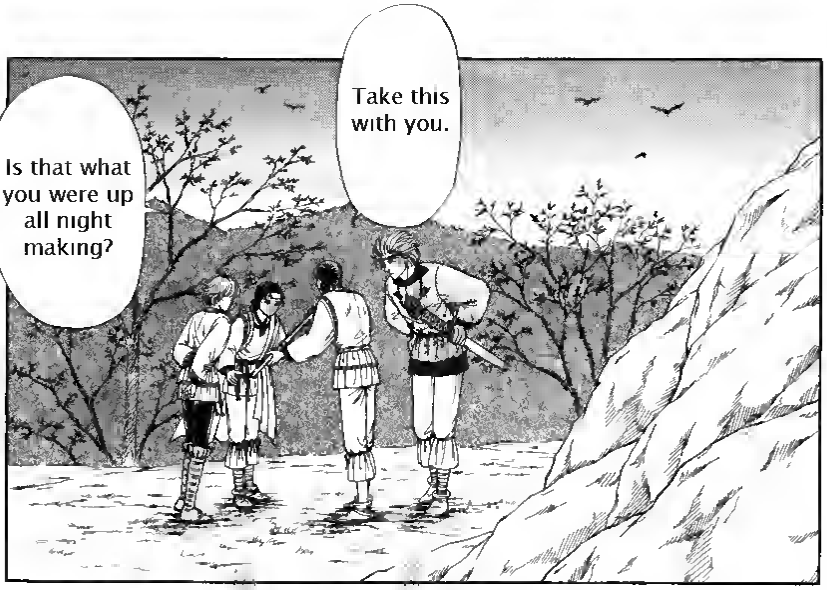
If you feel such con-tempt for humans ...
...why break your heart over them?
I don't know...
Probably because humans could not live if no one did that.
No...
I suppose that's superfi-cial.


If it were revenge, you'd have joined the demon gods.
...on the race that produced someone like me...
My revenge...
It might be revenge...
You're strong, wise and beautiful...
Even as I am...?
...love me...?
Can you...

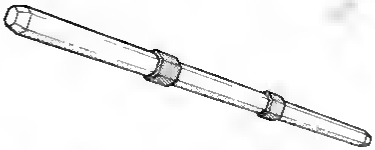
I've loved you for so long.
It doesn't matter... Whether you're male or female...
It's a bit late for that, isn't it?

I don't need a heart ...
Why not!?
AH HA HA HA
Want me.
Ask for all of me...

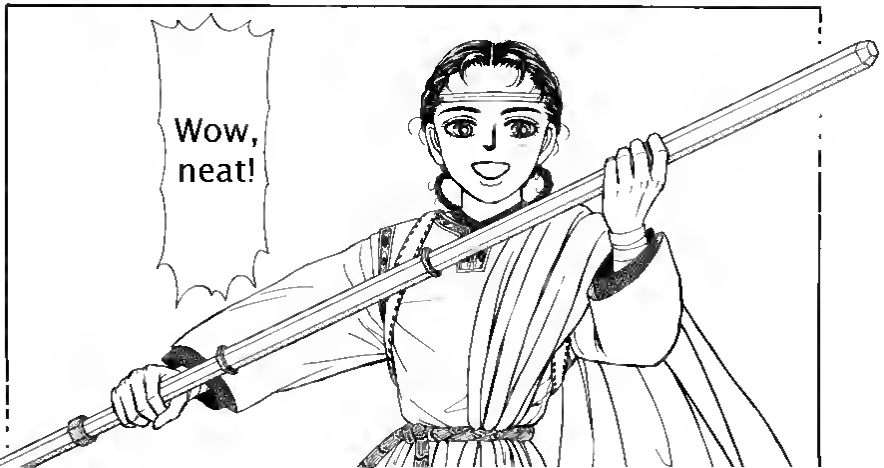
That's what I want.

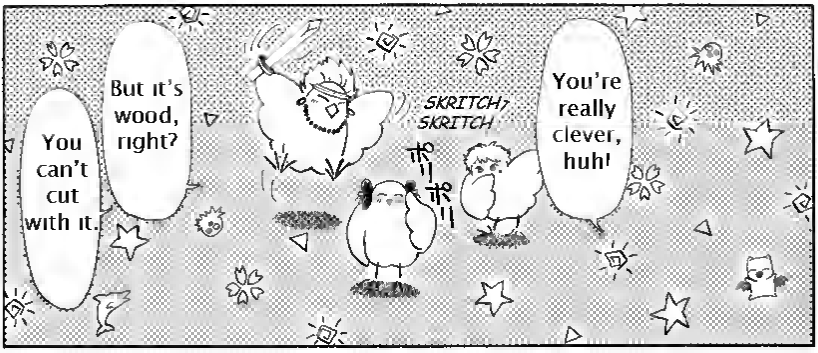


Twist that bit and that one to make it longer.



It should be at least a bit useful.




You can't cut with it.
But it's wood, right?
SKRITCH/ SKRITCH
You're really clever, huh!

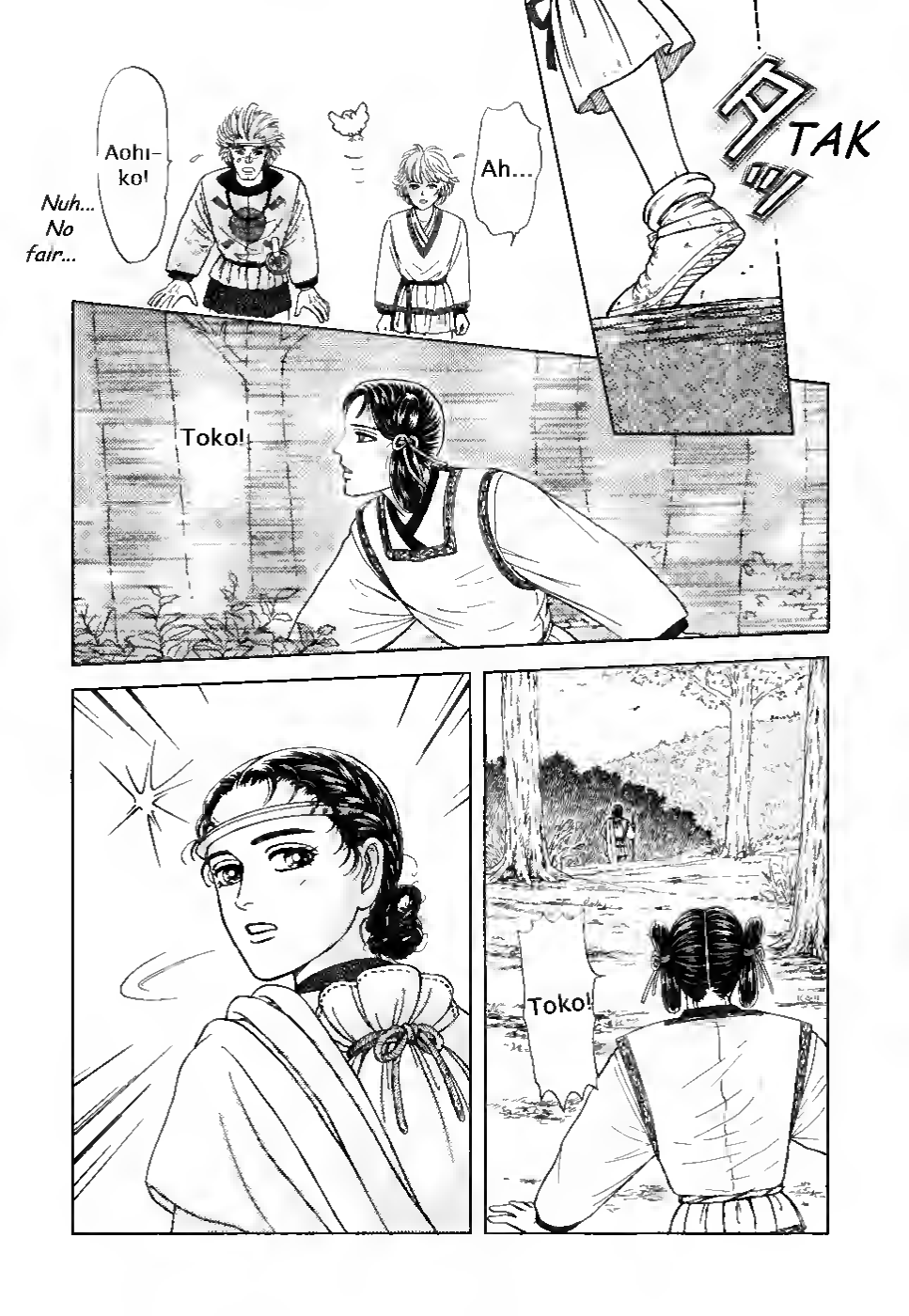
I can fight without killing!
That's what's great about it!

Be careful.
I will be back. I promise.
I hope you never have to use it.
Thank you, Aohiko!

No... It'll hurt more that way.
NO!
Let me see you to the cliff.
Yoko-oo...
He's big
I'll protect him with my Life!
Leave it to me!
Protect him!
I mean it!
Take care of Aohiko!
Kyoji!
I'd love to, but as far as he's concerned, I'm just a snack.
...for Nachi.
You look out...
Kimi-ka...

Mm... hm...
You're the only one with Nachi now. Have a little confidence!
That's not true!
CLACK
CLACK
It looks like it's gonna rain any minute.
I'm off!
Okay!

Yoko-oo!
Some-how...
Don't say that!
We may not see her ag...
This Uh-fee-oh... ling ...
Somehow, this is making me really lonely...
Toko...


Aohi-ko!
Nuh... No fair...
Ah...
TAK
Toko!
Toko!

Aohiko!
Aohi-
ko!
Even if I want to wait, I may not be able to.

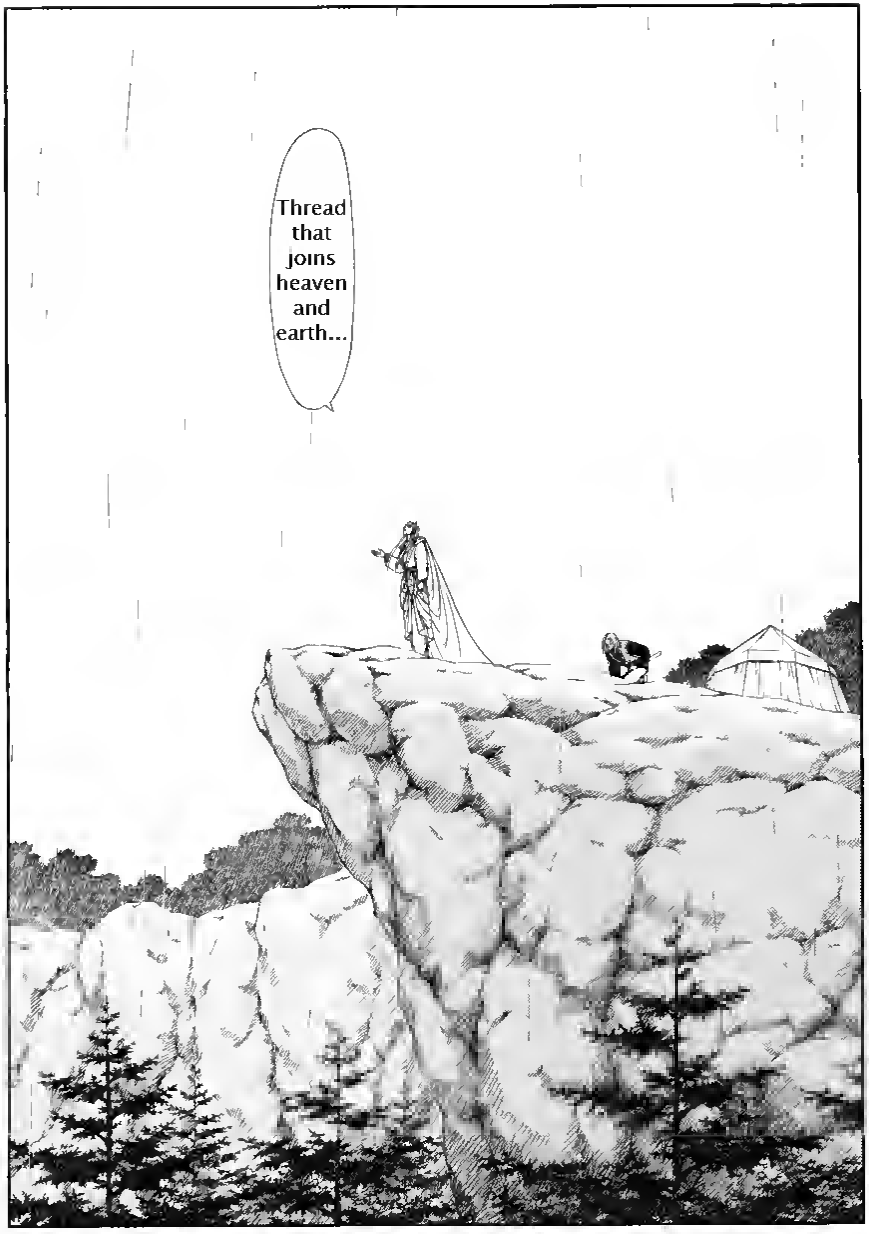
...I may not know you any longer...
When we next meet ...

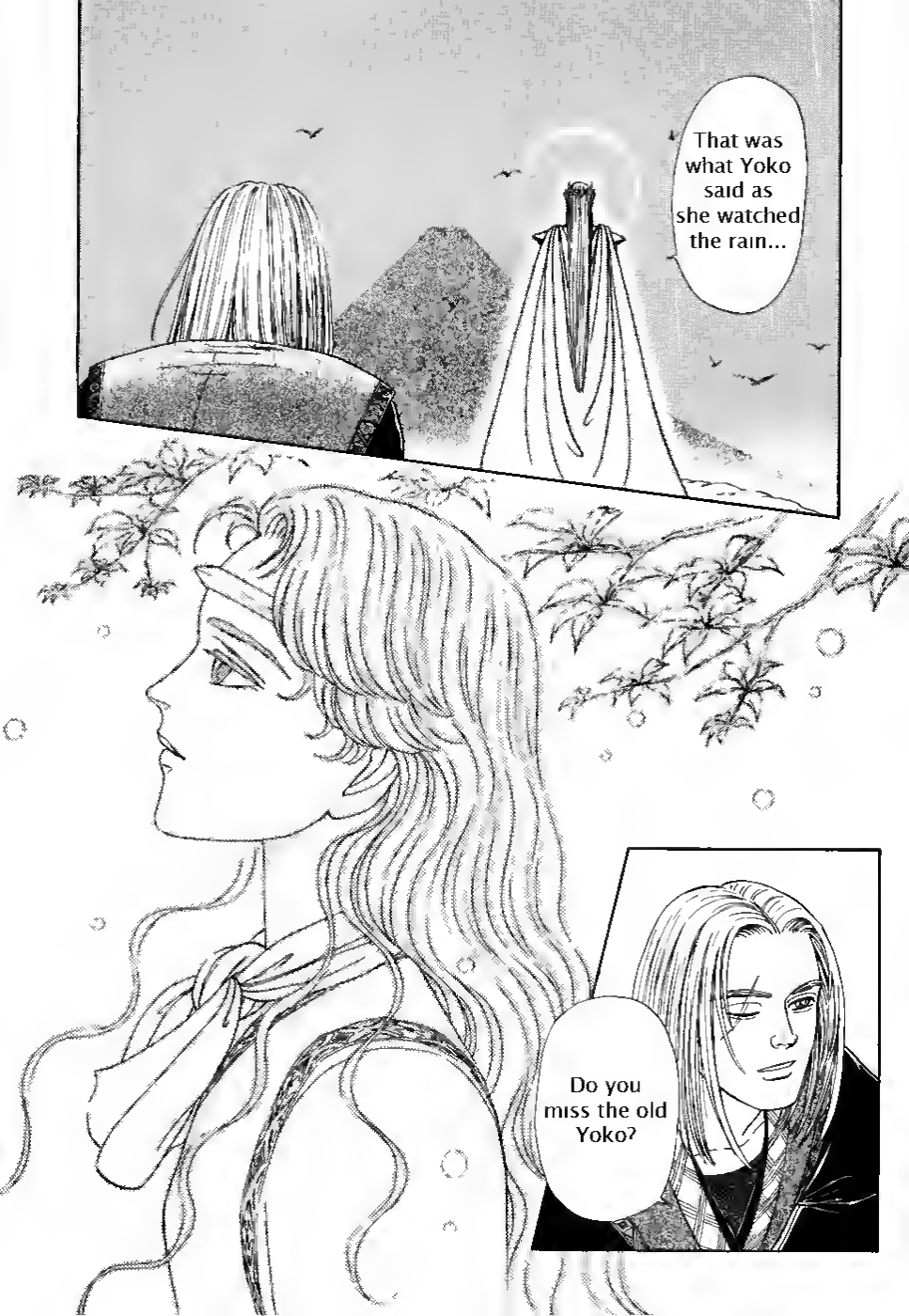
The miracle that's happened to you is something very special.
Take good care of your body... Your life...

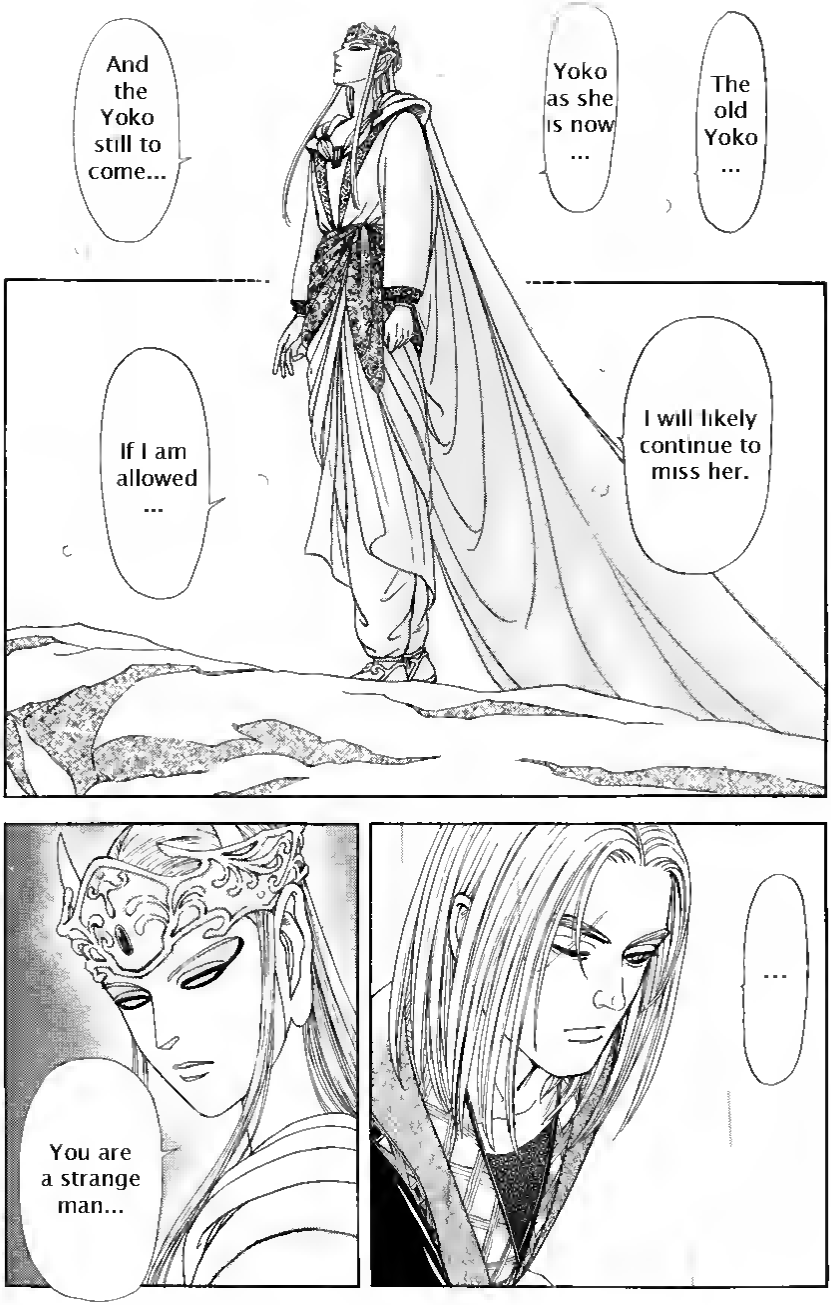
...

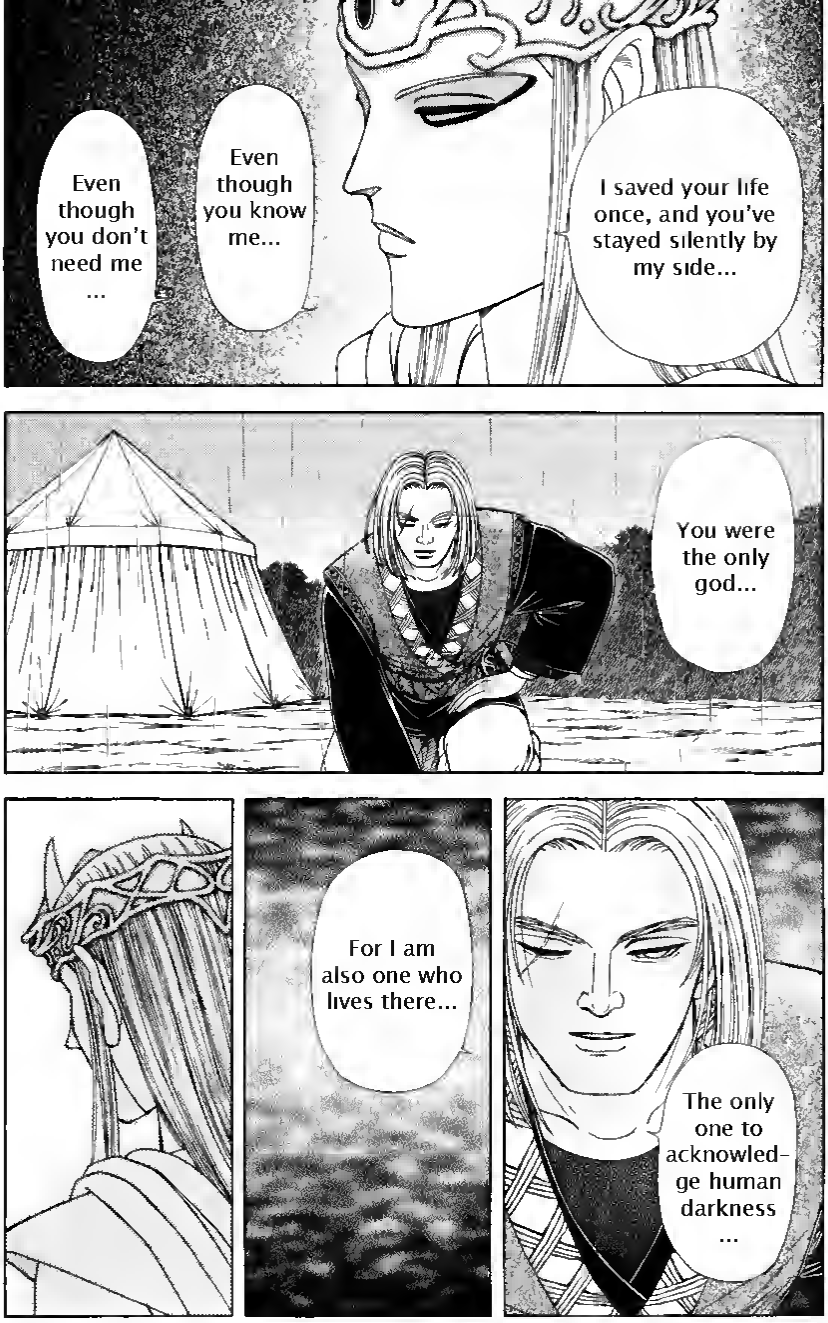
Don't talk like we'll never meet again!

To Katsu-ra...
Give it to her...
That comb ...
I'll come back, too, I promise...
Look! It's raining.
Raining ...
Aohiko ...


Thread that joins heaven and earth...

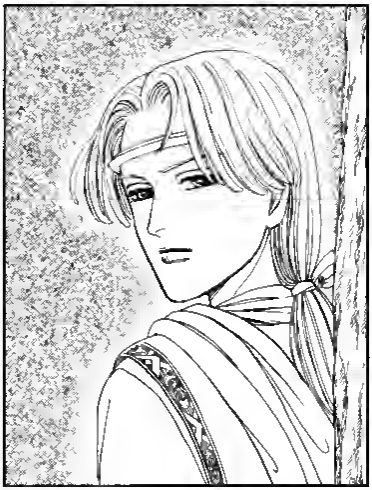

That was what Yoko said as she watched the rain...
Do you miss the old Yoko?


And the Yoko still to come...
Yoko as she is now ...
The old Yoko ...
If I am allowed ...
I will likely continue to miss her.
You are a strange man...
...

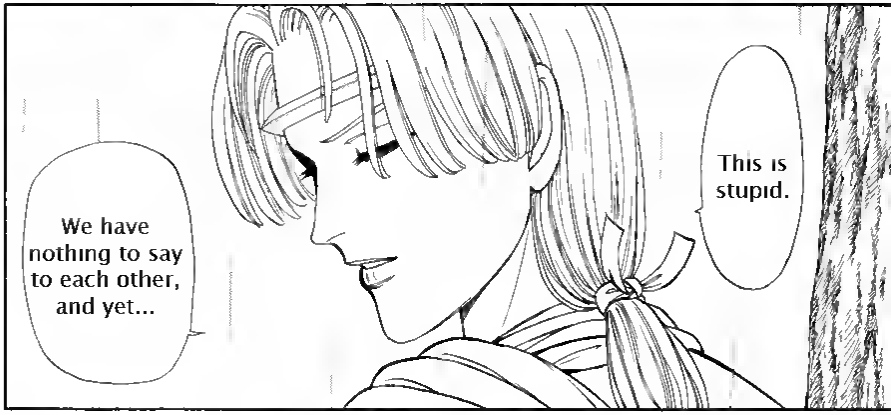

Even though you don't need me ...
Even though you know me...
I saved your life once, and you've stayed silently by my side...
You were the only god...
For I am also one who lives there...
The only one to acknowledge human darkness ...

Clear, shining thread...
Thread that joins heaven and earth ...
A beautiful metaphor that suggests Yoko... or rather, Toko herself.
She's run-ning ...
...as Aohiko sees her off...

SPLISH
Hibiki!

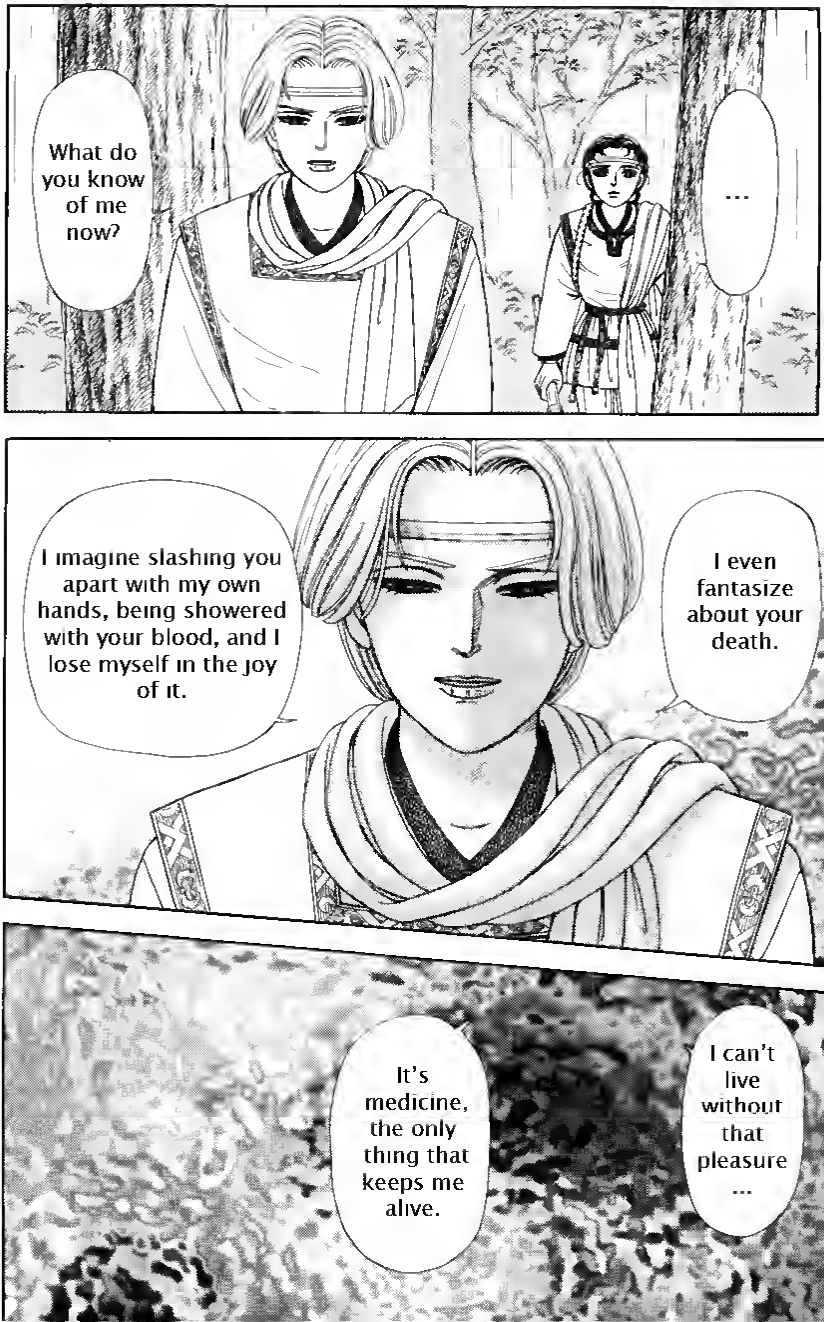


Hibiki!


We have nothing to say to each other, and yet...
This is stupid.

To see me off...
But you came.

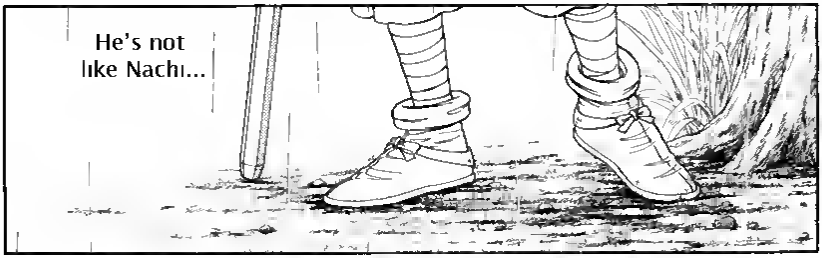
You have to live, Hibiki...
Live, all right?
Once ...
The old Yoko said those words to herself...

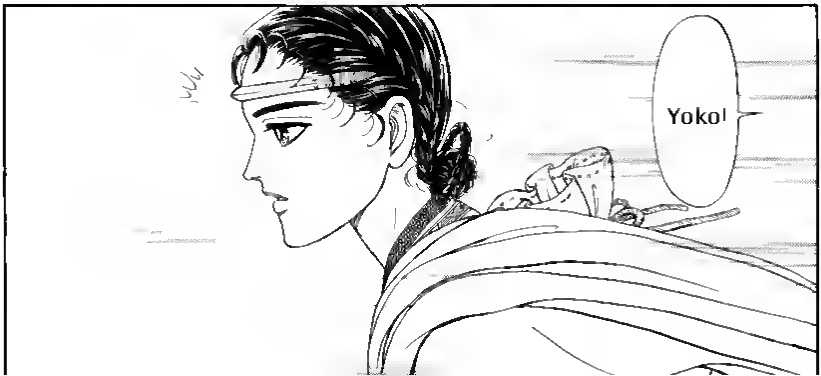

What do you know of me now?
...
I imagine slashing you apart with my own hands, being showered with your blood, and I lose myself in the joy of it.
I even fantasize about your death.
It's medicine, the only thing that keeps me alive.
I can't live without that pleasure ...

I should live and keep killing...?
Or is it Yoko?
Is it you!?
Even then, you'd tell me to live?
Until you need no medicine at all.
Until you find another medicine.
Live until you're free...
Live...

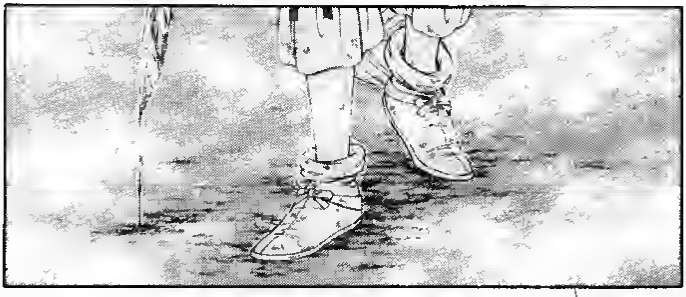
Hibiki ...
You may go.
Go!
I don't want freedom.
Don't get me wrong.
I want to live with this pleasure.

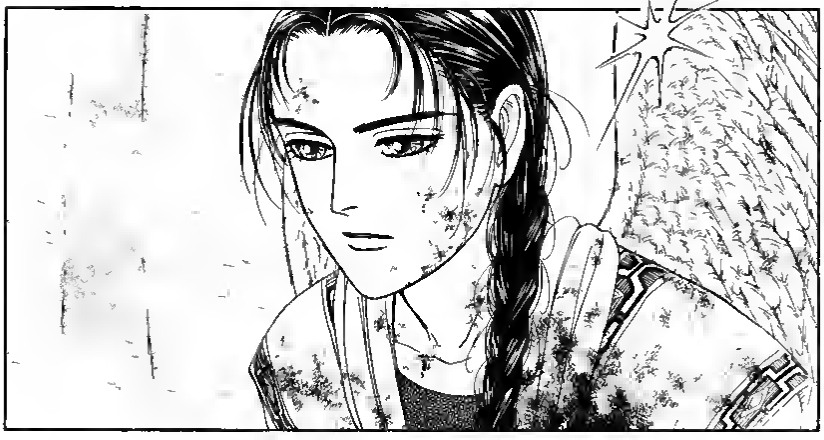
Hibiki looks as if he's in pain.

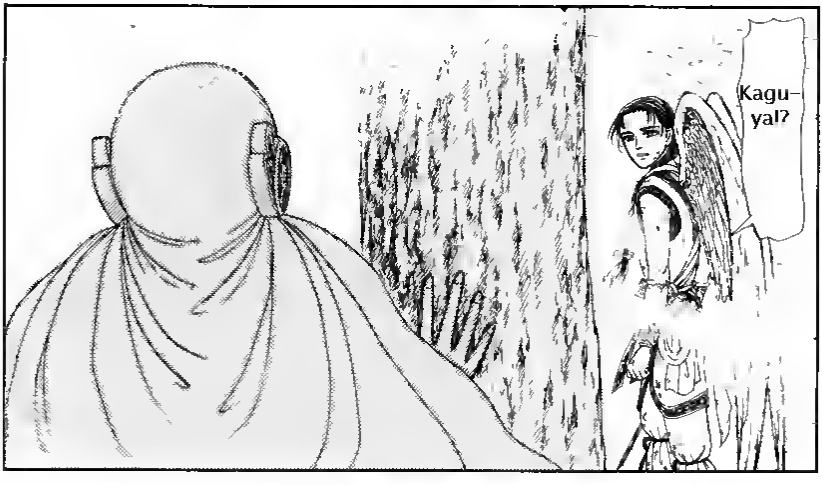




Don't get hurt.
Be careful.
As long as you have that headband, they'll treat you as Kiyu's warrior.
I won't ...
...
I won't!





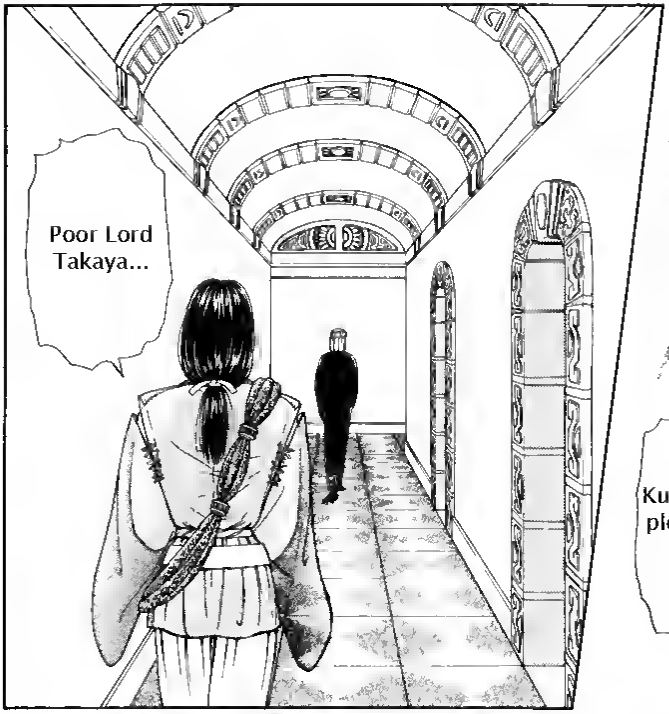

Kagu-
ya!?

What brings you here ...?
What is it?
I'm filthy today...
Oh... I'm sorry.
Have you already forgotten the illusion you saw here?
Takaya ...

To...ko?
Illus-ion?
The girl...
Toko...
That was what you called it.
Kagu-ya?
What about those you left when you came here with me?

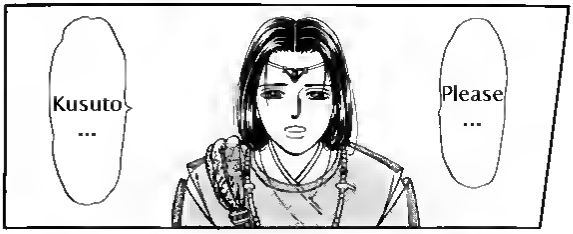
But I've always been here.
Before I came here...?
There is a dead white tree that way, and a small waterfall beyond it.
Go cleanse yourself and return to the village
Kagu-ya?
Never mind.
Go.

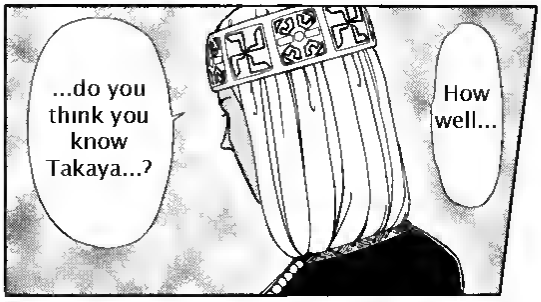
You look like a scolded child...
My night vision's good
I can stay a bit longer.
Enou-gh!
How many did you save today?
You do more than enough for us.
Fif-teen!
I saved fifteen...
...and killed twenty-seven!



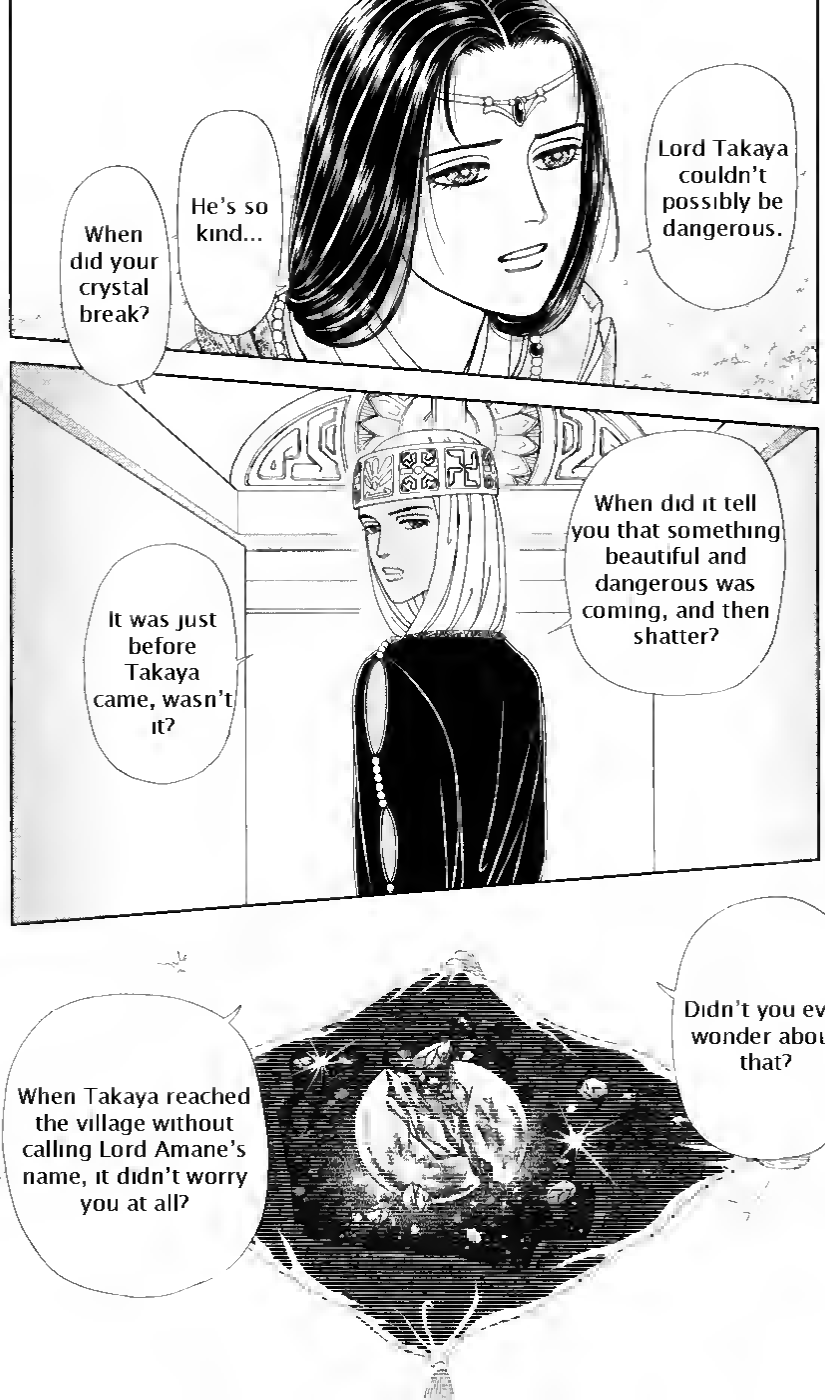
Don't leave him like this, Kusuto!

Kusuto, please!



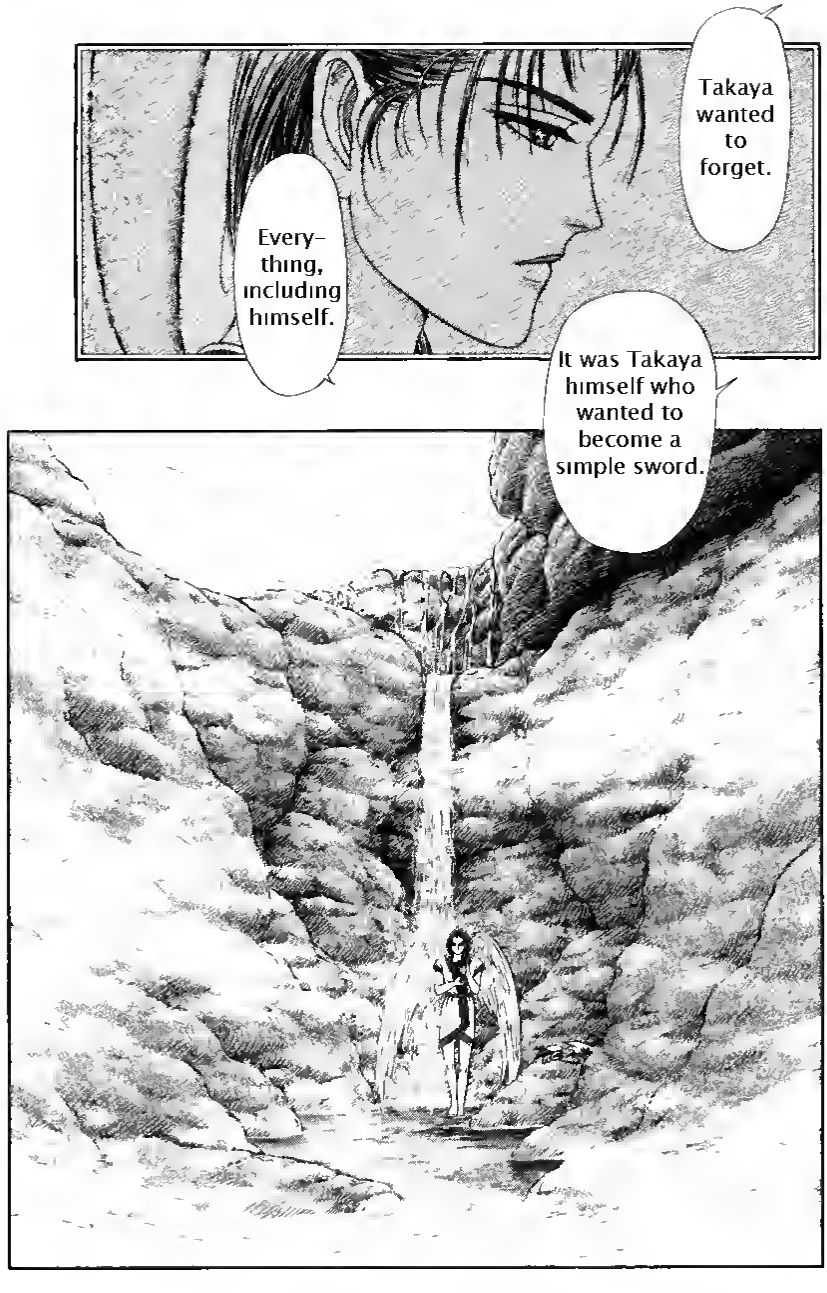


I cast a spell on myself.
I told myself to wake when Lord Amane was in danger.
I did not know what sort of danger, or its source...
I told myself to wake when something touched the spirit-threads I'd cast throughout the area.
As you know, my powers of suggestion are my strongest ability, stronger even than my precognition.
And I woke...
...when Takaya entered the forest of illusory mists.


Lord Takaya couldn't possibly be dangerous.
He's so kind...
When did your crystal break?
When did it tell you that something beautiful and dangerous was coming, and then shatter?
It was just before Takaya came, wasn't it?
Didn't you ever wonder about that?
When Takaya reached the village without calling Lord Amane's name, it didn't worry you at all?

However, he's a double-edged sword.
I want to believe that it isn't Takaya as well.
... Well, I...
I've made him into a sword that will protect Lord Amane without fail.
Don't think of Takaya as human now.
That is a mindless sword.
A perfect, sacred sword that knows no sorrow or sickness.

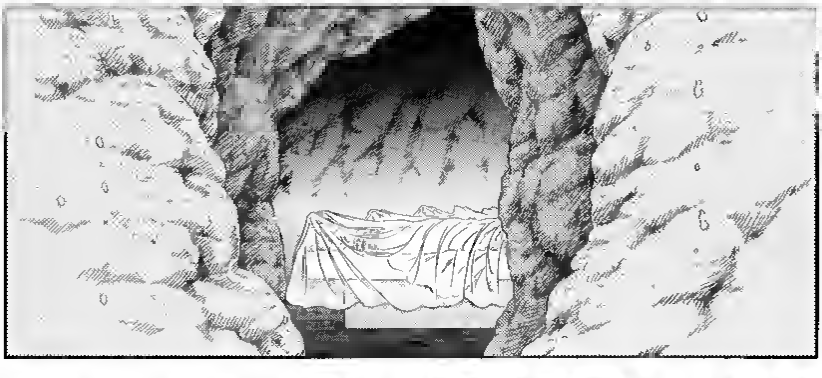
Lord Takaya is human!
He isn't a sword!
Sarai ...
What did I first say?
I asked how well you knew Takaya.
Takaya was drawn in by my suggestion so easily because, deep down, he wanted to accept it.
Listen ...
His heart was worried and torn...
His bright eyes were shadowed...
Didn't you notice?

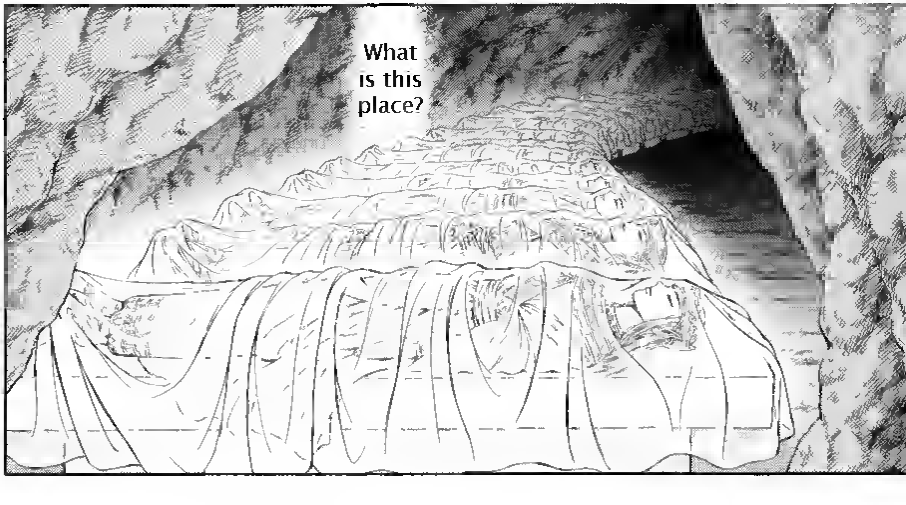

Takaya wanted to forget.
Every-thing, including himself.
It was Takaya himself who wanted to become a simple sword.

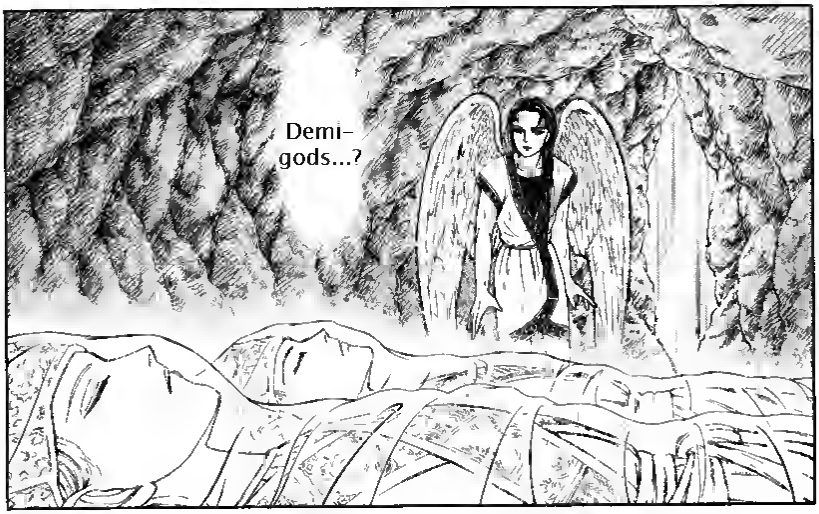
SPLISH
SPLASH
To...
SPLASH
o...
SPLASH
ko...
Ugkh!

That name...
Wh...
What is it...?
PANT
PANT
Ugkh!
...o...
To...

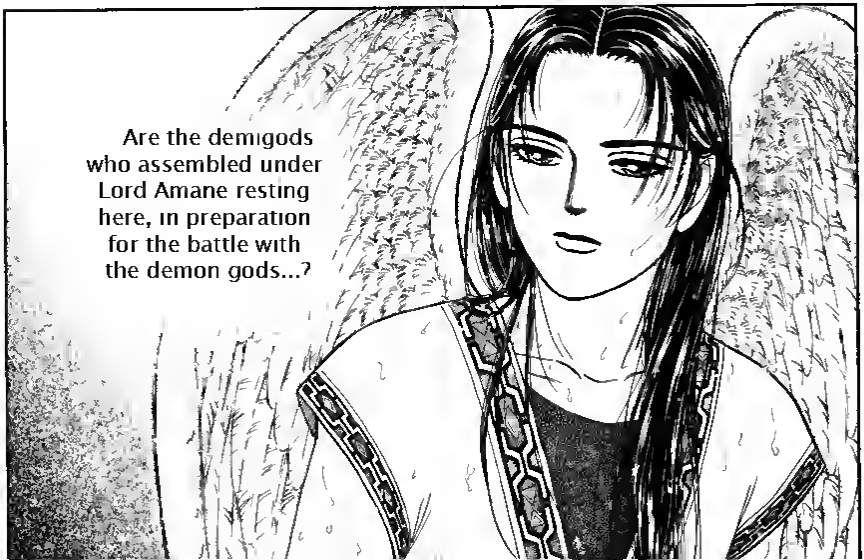
GASP

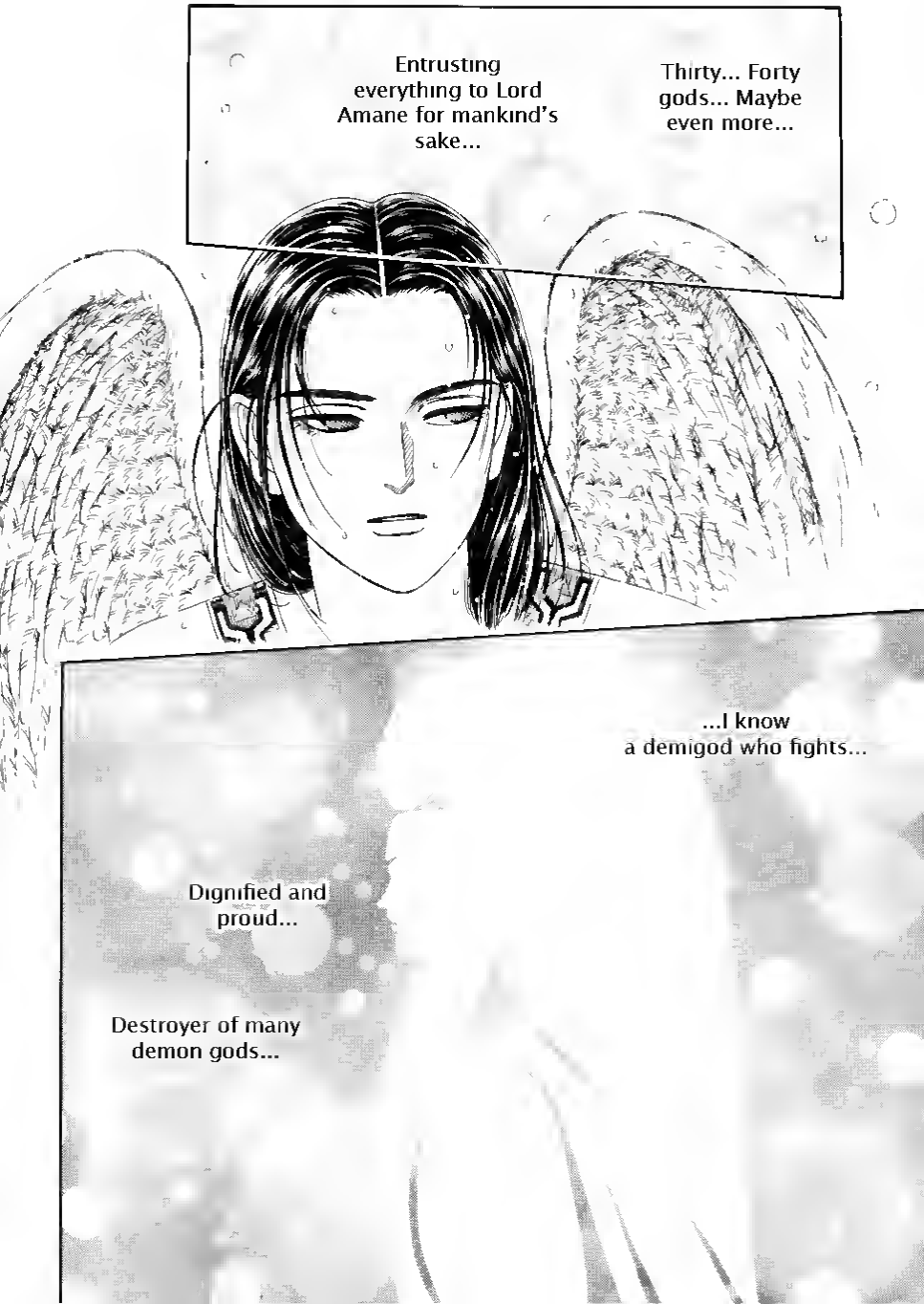


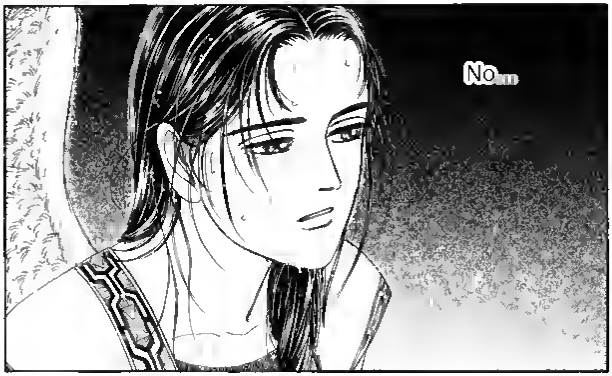

What is this place?



"Coexistence with
the only god... That is all."

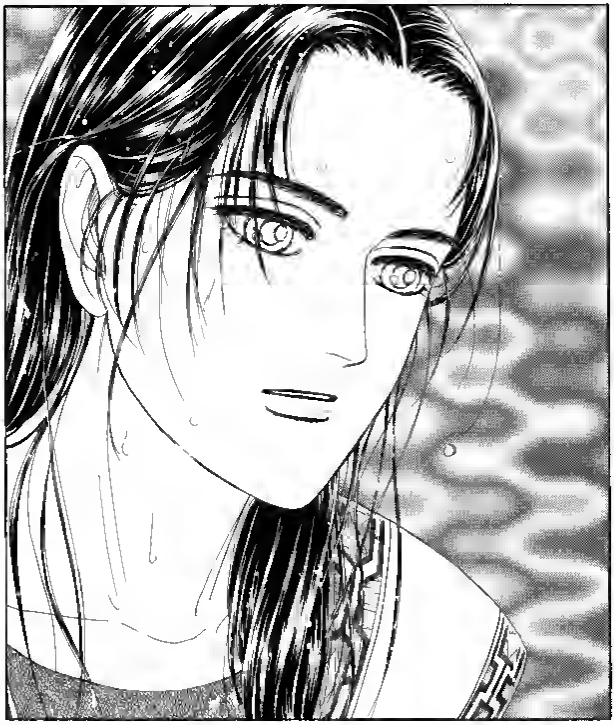



Entrusting everything to Lord Amane for mankind's sake...
Thirty... Forty gods... Maybe even more...
...I know a demigod who fights...
Dignified and proud...
Destroyer of many demon gods...



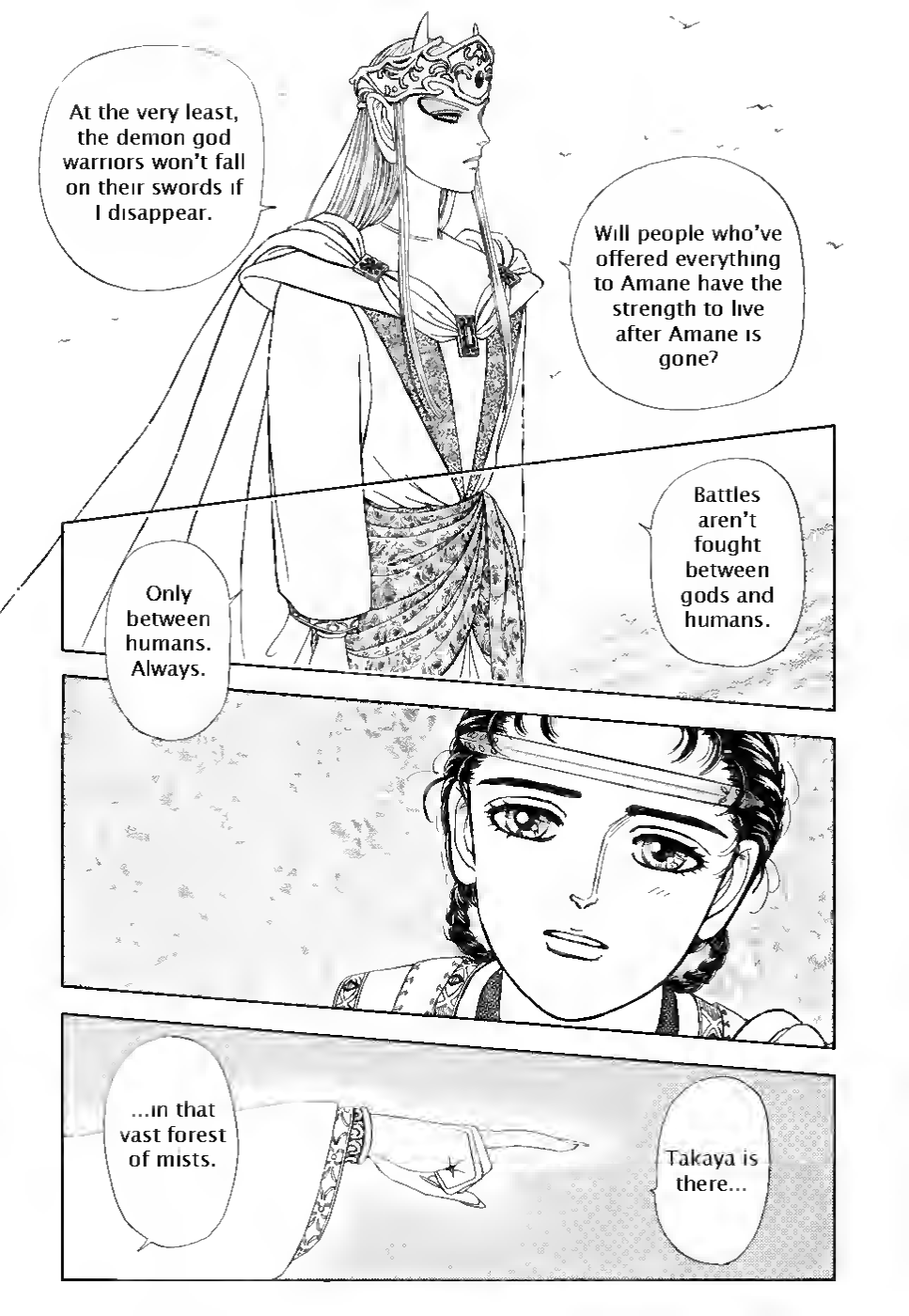
I don't know...

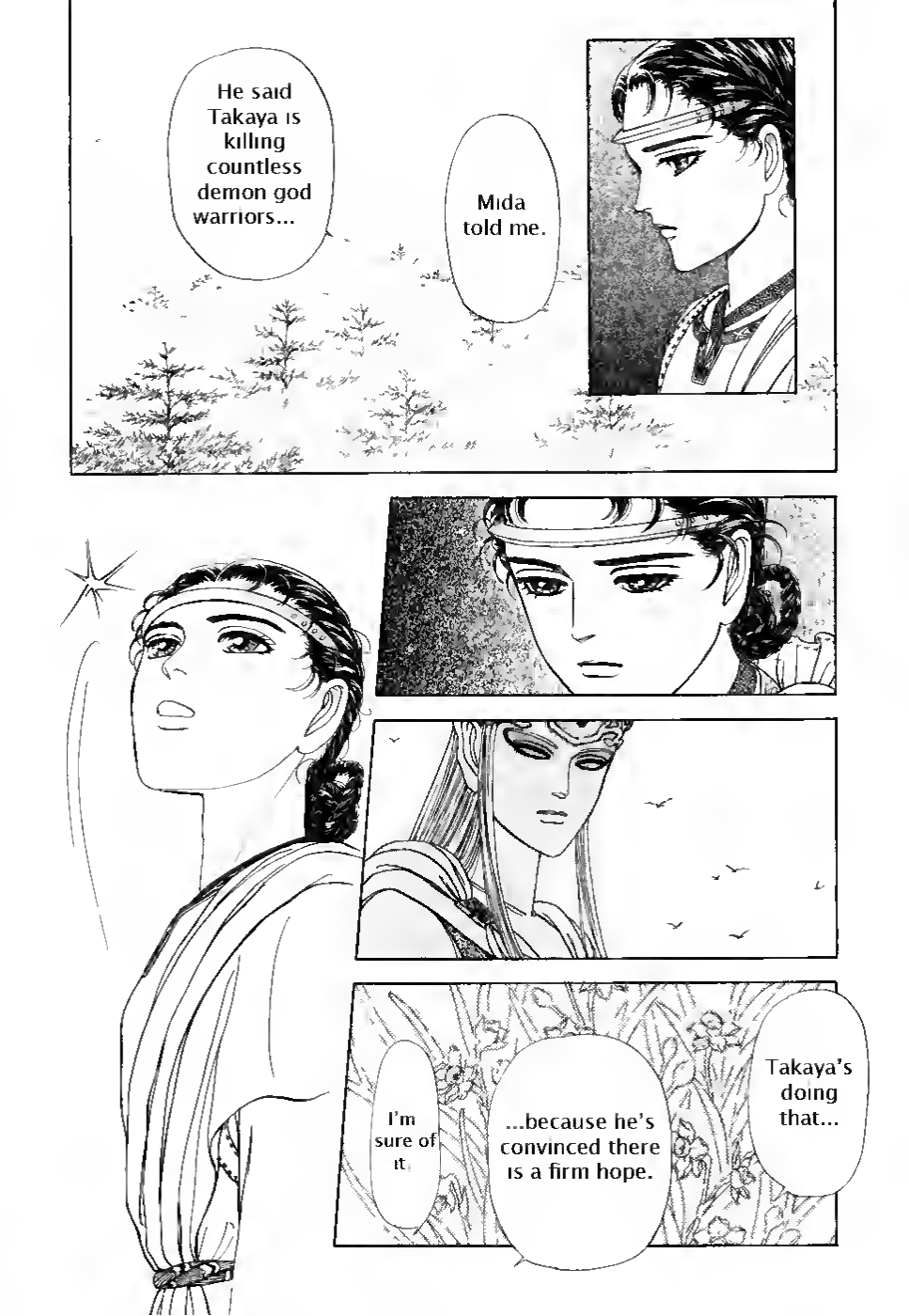
The only demigods I know are Lord Amane and Kaguya...



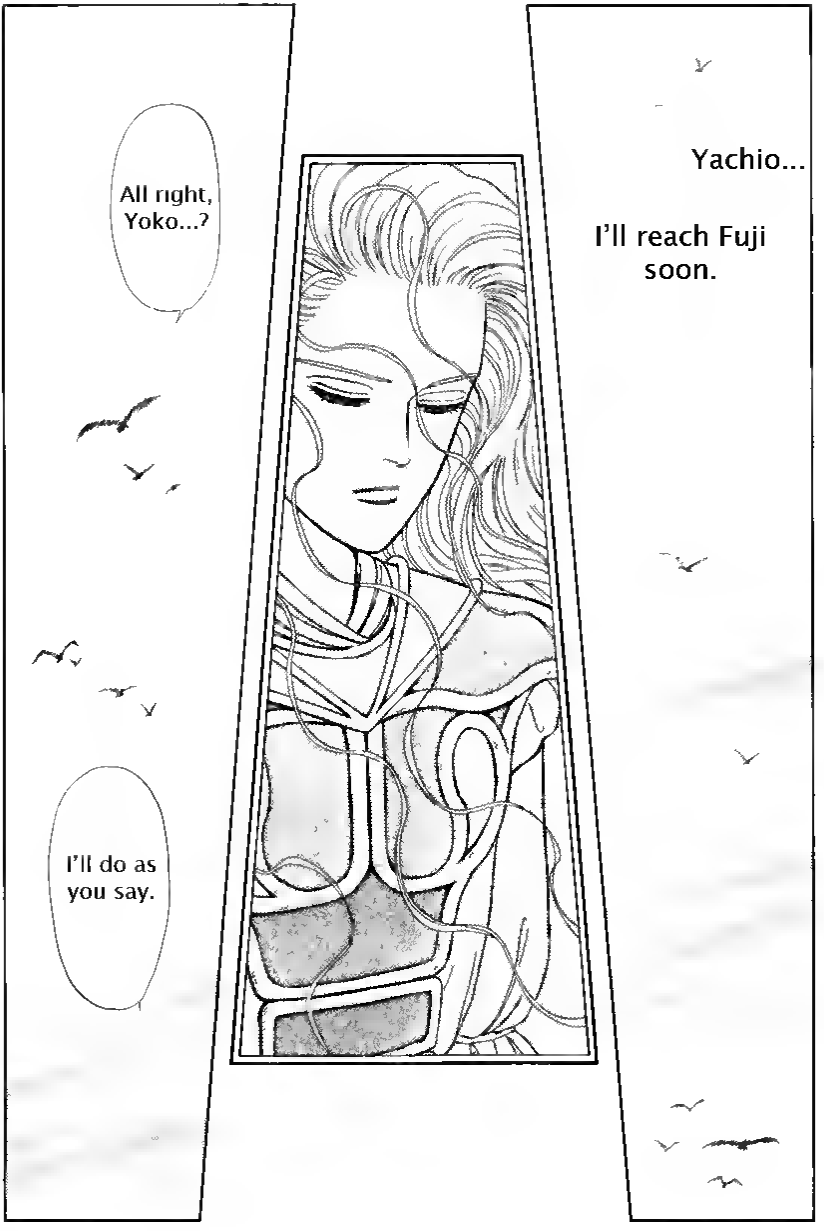
Kiyu, you mustn't!
I can't accept that.
That isn't ...
I...
I'm no longer your warrior, Kiyu...
There is no other way.
You must accept it.

Can Amane...
...save one such as Nachi ...?
I want to know.
You will do it...
...because you are you
What do you intend to do with the people of Fuji, Kiyu?


At the very least, the demon god warriors won't fall on their swords if I disappear.
Will people who've offered everything to Amane have the strength to live after Amane is gone?
Battles aren't fought between gods and humans.
Only between humans. Always.
...in that vast forest of mists.
Takaya is there...

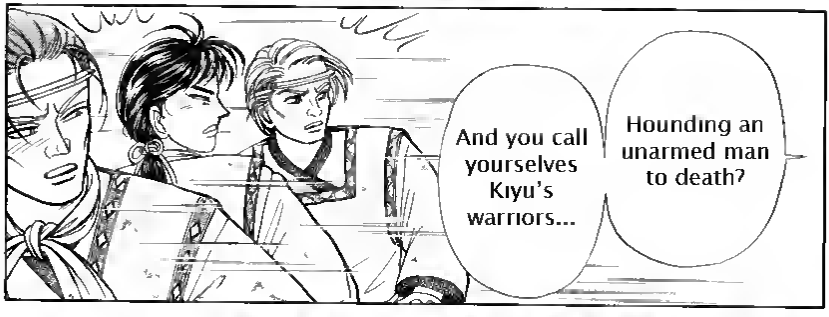

He said Takaya is killing countless demon god warriors...
Mida told me.
Takaya's doing that...
...because he's convinced there is a firm hope.
I'm sure of it.

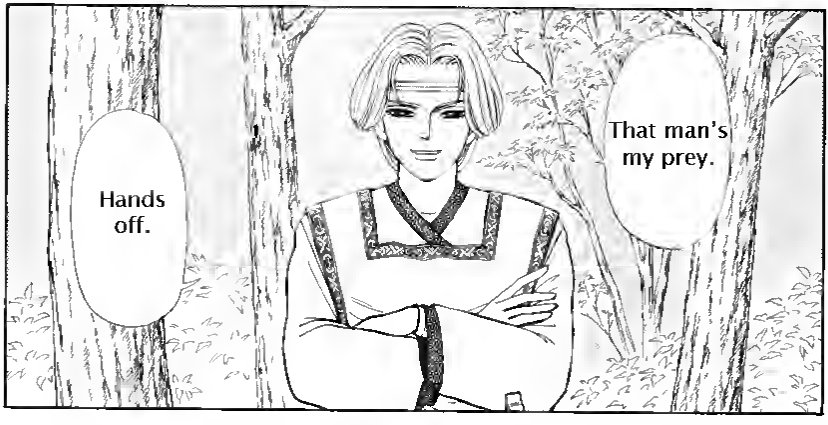
Yachio ...?
He seems sad...
...watching us.
He's been...
You and Yachio seem linked by an unseen thread.
A being apart from both demon gods and demigods...


All right, Yoko...?
I'll do as you say.
Yachio...
I'll reach Fuji soon.

Everyone suddenly surrounded Nachi!
Some-thing's up!
Cap-tain!
Cap-tain!
I don't know which demon god it is, but somebody's controlling them.
Kiyu's not here, and Nachi doesn't have his sword!
Do some-thing! Hurry!

You betrayed Kiyu, and he still saved your life.
Being Kiyu's favorite.
Must be nice ...
Heh heh heh heh heh!
He'll save you again.
Well... He might not make it in time this time.
HEH HEH HEH
Let's find out.
GLATTER...


And you call yourselves Kiyu's warriors...
Hounding an unarmed man to death?


Hands off.
That man's my prey.

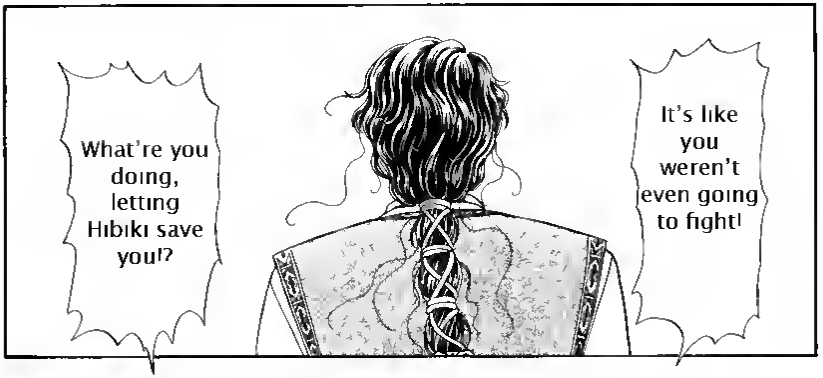
HE
HE
HE
HE
You're tough, but you've got that girly face...
We don't like you either!
Get 'em both!
WAAAAAAH

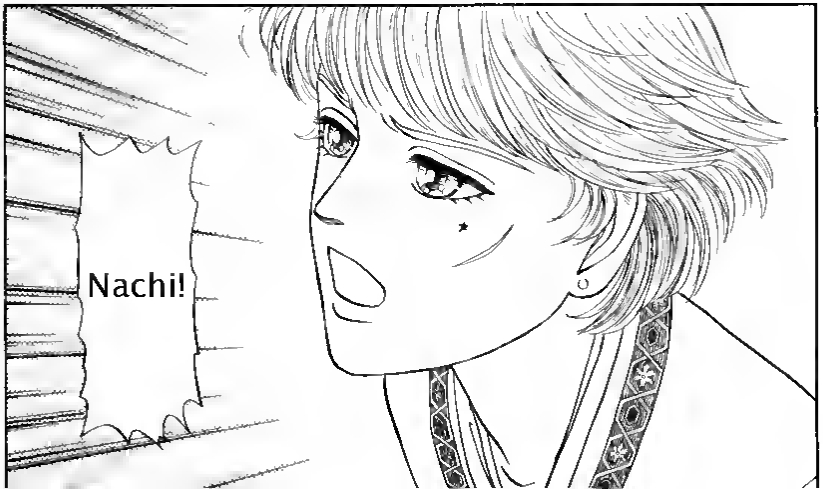
HA HA HA HA
What do you think you're doing, while Kiyu's away!?
Stop!

Snap out of it!
Mi... Mida!
You'll never invade Fuji that way!
Your loyalty to Kiyu is weak! That's why other demon gods take advantage of you!

Make sure you're ready!
Listen up! We're attacking a village in the north valley soon!
Go!
Nachi!
Hey, Nachi!

I didn't think they'd beat you, but...
Come on! Get ahold of yourself already!


What're you doing, letting Hibiki save you!?
It's like you weren't even going to fight!


Nachi!

Do you have a plan to destroy Aohiko?
Is this loafing around all day twiddling your thumbs part of some scheme?
I haven't been going to see him every day for nothing, you know.
A way ...
...to destroy him... for sure...
A way to completely destroy him...
I've already found it.

But I won't tell you...
I'll never tell!

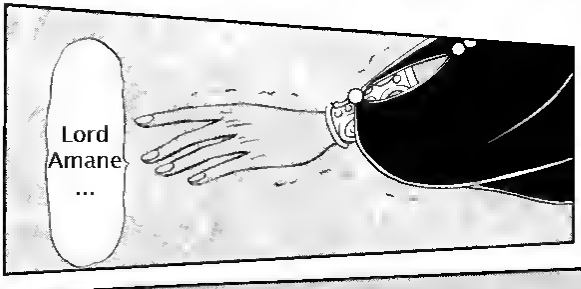
This is a forest of illusions...

Takaya is here...

What a strange forest...
They won't answer me.
The trees are all dozing.
I feel a bit sorry for them...

Taka-
ya!
Taka-
ya!
Taka-
ya!

Takaya...
...


Lord Amane...

That's Toko... isn't it?

Th...That girl must not enter the village.
She's dange-rous.
Kusuto ...
You're trembling ...
No one...
...has ever disturbed me this much...

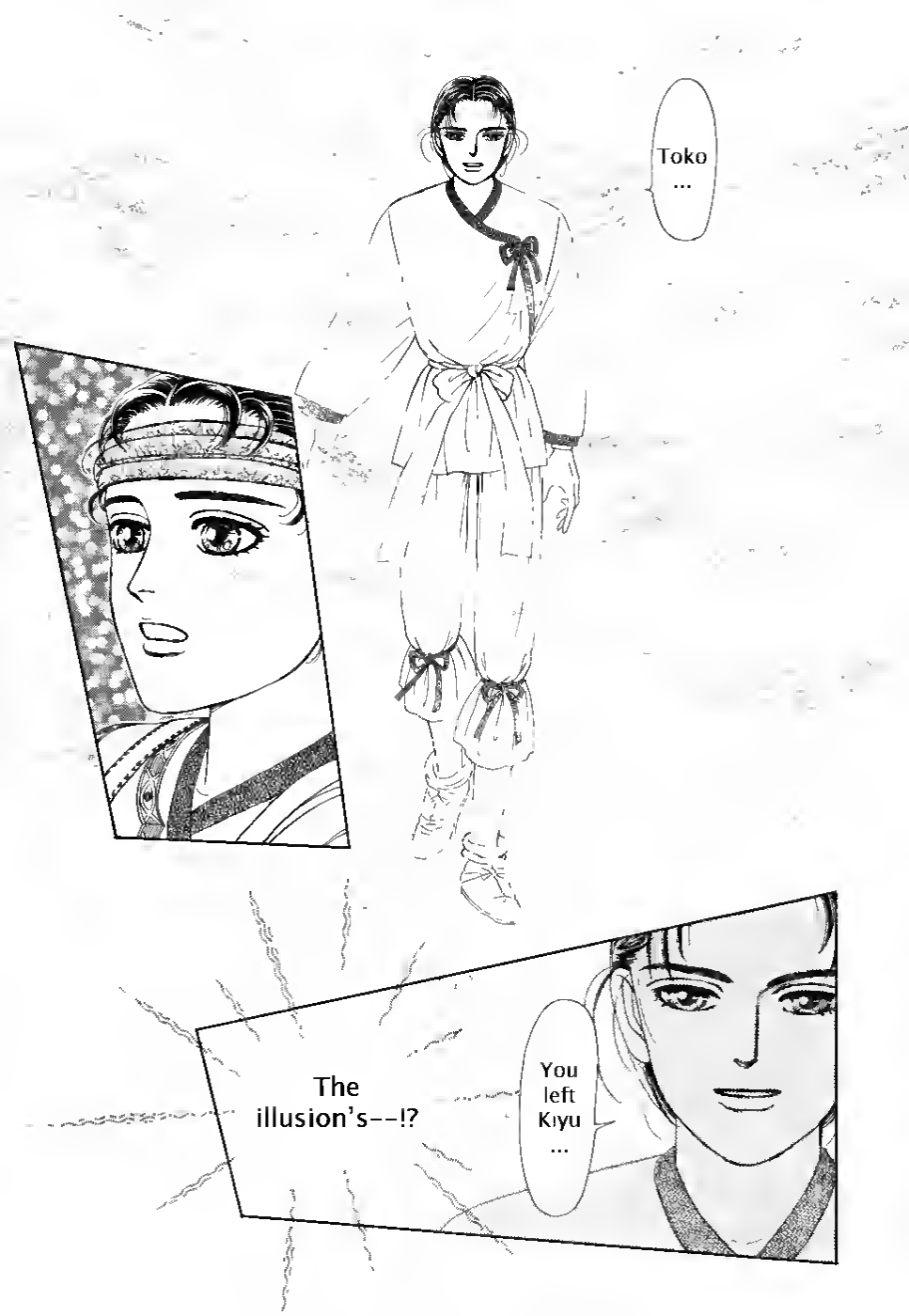
I'll make sure she can never approach the forest of illusory mists again.
That girl is Kiyu's warrior!
Kusuto! Don't be rough with her...
Just look at her. She must have fled from Kiyu.
She's chasing an illusion of Takaya...

Takaya is approaching Toko...
Kusu-to!
Even now, the mere wavelength of the name "Toko" is enough to disturb Takaya.
You mustn't let them meet now.
If they meet, my suggestion may fail.
Would you let Kiyu steal Takaya?
Because they're calling for each other so insistently...

It's... an illusion...

This is the forest of illusory mists, after all...

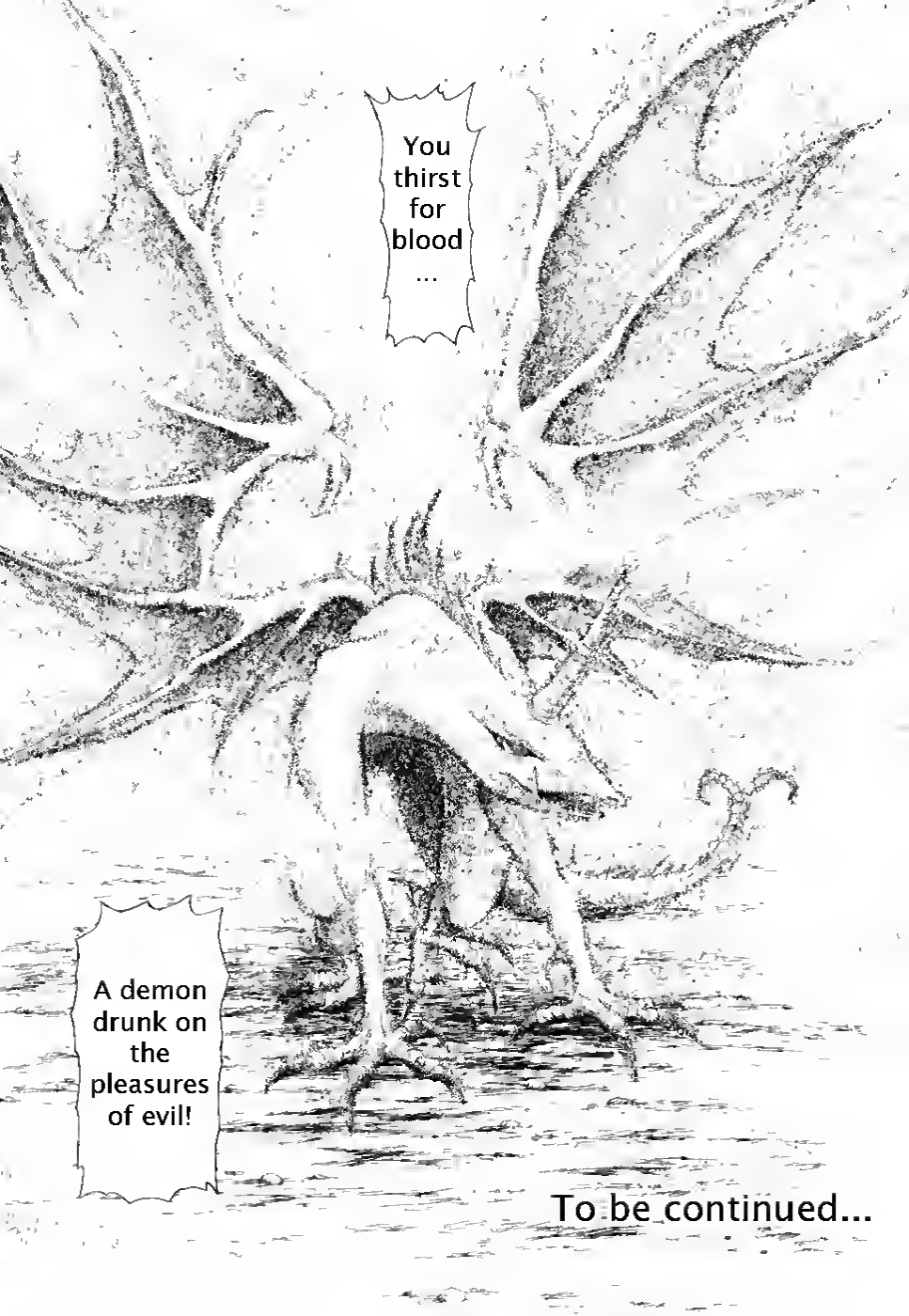
It's Takaya...
But...
Even if it's an illusion...
...it's Takaya...


Toko
...
The illusion's--!?
You left Kiyu ...

How many demon gods has Kiyu assembled?
...
Did you run away?
Who... is it?
What... is this?
Can't you ans-wer...?
You won't answer?

Kiyu sent you, didn't he?
Who are you...?
Go...
Go!

This is no place for you!
Ill-omened one!
This is your true form!


You thirst for blood ...
A demon drunk on the pleasures of evil!
To be continued...

Itihasa 12

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First e-book edition-May 2015

Publisher
Creek & River Co., Ltd
C&R Group Bldg.,
2-10-9, Kojimachi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo Japan 102-0083

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